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THE LITTLE DARK MAN AND OTHER RUSSIAN SKETCHES

By ERNEST POOLE

Author of "The Harbor," "The Village,"
"The Avalanche," etc.



Ernest Poole spent some time in Russia both before and after the war, and the two previously published volumes of histories of Russian life ("The Village" and "The Dark People") have shown his sympathetic understanding of the Russian character.

This new book contains "The Dormeuse," "The Little Dark Man," "Stories That His Uncle Told," and "Mother Volga." These tales, now mystical, now humorous, are all filled with the atmosphere of Russian folklore and peasant superstition, and together they create a vivid impression of simple life in the little Russian villages.



THE LITTLE DARK MAN

BY
ERNEST POOLE

BEGGAR'S GOLD
THE HARBOR
HIS FAMILY
HIS SECOND WIFE
BLIND: A STORY OF THESE TIMES
THE DARK PEOPLE
THE VILLAGE: RUSSIAN IMPRESSIONS
DANGER
THE AVALANCHE
MILLIONS

THE LITTLE DARK MAN

And Other Russian Sketches

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TO
M. A.

The Author wishes to acknowledge the courtesy of the editors of *Harper's Magazine*, the *Atlantic*, the *Independent* and *Our World*, in permitting the reprinting, in this little volume, of stories which have recently been published in their magazines.

THE DORMEUSE

THE LITTLE DARK MAN

And Other Russian Sketches

THE DORMEUSE

"Now you see only its bones," he said, "but once it was a great affair. Such a sleigh will never be seen again. My grandmother called it 'the *Dormeuse*,' and she traveled in it thousands of versts on roads quite rough with snow and ice. She traveled by day and in the night, on tours to inspect the large estates belonging to her family. And she was but a girl of nineteen at that time—now nearly ninety years ago."

We sat in a long-neglected garden beside a rude small manor house, half of frame and half of logs, high up on a wooded river bank in the northern part of Central Russia. It was the early autumn of 1917; the Revolution had already run through its initial stage, and the Bolsheviki were soon to come in. Even here there were ominous

indications. During my stay in this home of my friend, this long-deserted birthplace to which he had come to say good-by, shots were frequently heard at night and wild exultant songs and yells from the darkness in the river below—from “the hooligans,” as he called them—bargemen, raftmen and the like—part of that vast hobo throng who for countless ages past had done the work on Russia’s rivers. Several houses along the river had been raided in these last weeks, and one of them burned to the ground. My friend slept with a rifle by his bed—but he was quite calm about it all. What must be, must be, he said; and he seemed to have centered his interest now on giving me, before the end, a picture of the life he had known on this small estate where he had been born. It was quiet here this afternoon. We had just come in from a long day’s tramp. His one remaining servant, a kind of tenant caretaker, was cooking our supper of fish and potatoes; and after a swim in the river we had come up to the garden to smoke. It was then that I noticed a rude old sledge, half covered by weeds, which lay beside the small log barn. It was an enormous old affair, some fifteen feet by eight or nine, its runners and frame of huge hewn

beams plated heavily with steel. At its corners stout posts ran up six feet, and on one of them my eye was caught by a large tattered shred of leather, with bits of blue satin and velvet attached, swinging idly in the light breeze. And these small bits of finery made all the rest of it seem the more gaunt—a skeleton, as my friend had said. He was smiling as he looked at it now.

“There is so much it could tell you,” he said. “It could make you feel how close we are in Russia still to rough and dark barbaric times; and also perhaps it could make you feel the never-ending mystery in our inward national life. You call us realists. So we are. But just because we are realists, we must come close to mysteries, too—for human existence is like that.” For a moment he was silent again.

“A story?” I suggested.

“Yes,” he replied, with a faint smile, “I know you—so I am thinking of that. I am thinking of many stories. . . . Now I shall decide on one—as my *grandmère*, Nadine Constantinovna, told it to me when I was a boy—sitting here on a day such as this, more than thirty years ago. But first you must be patient a little. Alone, it is only a strange adventure—it will not interest you so much unless

you hear a little which I will tell of my grandmother first—and also of her family. There were most various characters—stubborn, stern, meek, and human—sinners and saints, *ascètes* and *les gens du grand monde*. But there was in each generation a quality which it is now *à la mode* to call ‘psychic.’ And this quality exists among those alive to-day. We are quite poor now, but the family once owned many large estates and was much cherished at the court of Empress Catharine Second. The future mother of my *grandmère* was one of the greatest beauties and sharp, ready wits. But after the death of the Empress, everything was changed at the court; in lieu of the French, the German influence was introduced, together with the barracks discipline. No more good taste, no chivalry, nothing but a soldier parading. Even the ladies of the court, when meeting the coach of Paul the First, had to descend in the mud or snow at the side of the street like equal slaves, and there stand in a soldierlike posture until the Emperor was gone. Life became most annoying at court—so it was quite natural that the mother of my *grandmère* wished but one thing, to go to France; and this she did—and soon became quite a desirable person within the Fau-

bourg St. Germain, and lived there gayly and happily to the extent permitted by her severe *chaperon*, who brought her to the homes of then illustrious persons. There she met her future husband, also a Russian land-owner, who had come to live in France in order to study the Napoleonic code of law. They were married soon, and in 1809 was born my little grandmother.

“From the very cradle she was surrounded by French nurses, and afterward teachers, French influences of all kinds; and later she was placed in an aristocratic convent school. There was a strong Voltairean tinge in the education of the French aristocrats then. No wonder that the great Voltaire became her favorite study and reading for the largest part of her life! Still, of course, she must learn the religion. She was of the Russian creed, but through her mother’s love for France the girl had been placed in that Catholic school, and was taught by a Jesuit father, who passed superficially enough over the religion itself and was more interested to form the *esprit fin* of the girls than he was in their religious feeling. The miracles which are described in the myths of the Roman Catholic Church, he communicated, but so finely that they were not stern

or fanatical, but more like a *fin esprit mondain* gossip—so that the girls often told of their *père* that he had plenty of *esprit fin*, but none of the *esprit sacré*. His one eternal motto was this:

“‘You must not repudiate things and phenomena only because either you or your friends have never yet observed them, or because they cannot be explained at the present state of our science. Believe or disbelieve—this is one’s free choice. But one must not say in advance that this or that is impossible simply because we cannot explain it.’

“With the strong fine inculcation of this attitude to any life, and also the sarcastic but at the same time open-minded influence of the great Voltaire—at last the education of my grandmother was finished. And now she had to return to Russia, to her parents, whose social standing in the meanwhile had enormously improved. For under the new Emperor Nicholas the First, her father, who for so many years had studied the jurisprudence in France, was appointed to be *procurator général* of Central Russia, an area equal to all France. He had the greatest power there, which he exercised with justice but still not sentimentally—destroying without mercy every serious culprit, no matter what his age or sex. His motto

was that the State must sacrifice its degenerate elements to give the full possibility of undisturbed development to all its normal members. To the pleaders for culprits, he replied, 'You interfere for the murderer and pray for me to save his life. You speak of his present sufferings because he is condemned to death. But he suffers so as he deserves. Why do you not consider the suffering of his victim, in an untimely horrible death? Why do you not plead for the innocent? We, the State, we plead for them. Now go to your home and stop, if you please, your sentimental lamentations for thieves, swindlers, and murderers!'

"So he worked with justice—but it was a justice with iron hands. He had little time for his own affairs. His large estates and those of his wife were scattered over four provinces, and the supervision over them was a difficult, stupendous job. On each estate was a manager, who had direct power over the peasants and often oppressed them mercilessly—to an extent which many times was dangerous to the owners, who were responsible before the law for the good treatment of their serfs. It was quite a difficult business to control those managers, especially when the estates were so large; and now, when my

grandmother returned, she found that her father's life was so crowded with the official work that he badly neglected his properties. Indeed, it was by such neglect that later on his fortune perished. But at this time my young *grandmère* resolutely that she must try her best, and so immediately she plunged into the control of the estates. She was then a young lady of only nineteen, and also her size was exceedingly small. At one of the Imperial balls, the Emperor, after dancing with her, said, '*Jolie, gracieuse, du fin esprit. Dommage qu'elle soit si petite!*' But in spite of her smallness and her youth, she showed now a surprising practical sense. Evidently, under the brilliant polish of her Parisian education, there had been some real training, too—but more than that, there was in her an amazing inborn force. Very often she traveled from one estate to another one, everywhere controlling and putting everything into order, with an energy and good sense not to be expected at all of such a young brilliant beauty.

"She traveled in an enormous *cortège* of servants and guards to protect her. The distances to cover during those journeys were often large. The roads, except the few government roads of a

strategic value, were utterly bad, and in spring and autumn they were quite impassable. So her traveling was done mostly in the wintertime, after the crops had been brought to the barns, so that she could learn on each estate how much had been the yield of the year. This part of Russia, at that time, was populated rather thinly, and most of the peasant serfs lived in villages rather large, very often surrounded with a deep ditch and a palisade, to protect the inhabitants against the attacks of brigands and wolves. My grandmother traveled with heavy guards.

"During one such trip she had to go from their Kaluga residence to one of her mother's large estates in the province of Voronej, where the population was not at all reliable. So she had a doubly heavy guard. You must try to picture her *cortège* as it came at fall of the night along a white and crooked road, sometimes through deep forests and again out in the open, where the first stars of the night could be seen. No less than sixty sledges came in a long and winding train, filled with forage for the horses and provisions for the men, and also materials for repair in case any sledges should break down. The largest of the sledges, pulled by sixteen horses

who were coming two abreast, carried along my little *grandmère* and her two young *cameristes*, in her *Dormeuse*—a cabin some fourteen feet by nine, and six feet high. The walls of thick wood were covered with oiled cloth and with steel outside; but within was a small elegant room, with wide seats of blue velvet which were also berths at night, a silver washstand, a folding desk, a small table for her dining, a little Parisian lamp for her reading, and a very large one to assist in making her warm—and many other little things, most of them of Parisian make. The cabin was upholstered with velvet and blue satin. Two little windows were in the walls, but each one had a thick steel plate to be locked on in case of attack. In the cabin's upholstered walls were pockets for money and jewelry, and also for her favorite books.

“On the night of this adventure, she said, she had finished writing some letters at her little Parisian desk, her two *cameristes* had served her supper, and now she was reading a book of Voltaire. While she was reading, the *cortège* arrived at the gates of a lonely village, surrounded with a high thick palisade of oaken logs and a deep trench. Not a sound was heard for quite a

while, during which the guards of the train shouted and beat upon the gates. Only dogs fiercely barked within. But at last the gates were opened, she said, and slowly the *cortège* was allowed, one sledge after the other one, to enter into the village. Voronihino was its name. There was a long street with two rows of wooden two-storied houses, each of which with its barn and its sheds was surrounded by a separate, hugely thick oak palisade.

“An old man, the senior chief of the village, now asked many questions concerning the young traveler—who, from where and whither she was going, what age she was, and what were her habits and wants on a journey—explaining that all this he must know, to suit the lady the best that he could. In spite of his age—he was over sixty—he was very agile, active, and evidently he had the very strongest authority here. This power he now tried to impose on the chief of the *cortège*. But there he found his equal—so that in spite of his positive order to bring the horses into the stalls of the stables, he was not obeyed. Although it was nearly Christmas, the weather was rather mild that night, so that it was not quite necessary to stable the horses; and they were so wild that it

would be quite difficult to bring them out of the stalls the next day. So the chief of the *cortège* refused, and at the same time he placed all his guards around the sledges and horses. Then the old man began the question of forage and of provision for the men. But my grandmother's train had enough of both, and so the chief again declined, and asked only for beds for those of his men who would like to sleep within the houses.

"All this was done while my grandmother was quietly sitting in her *Dormeuse*. She wished to stay there for the night, but she yielded to the old village chief, who begged her to stay within his house. This she did, for she grew rather curious now; but with her she took her two young maids and the huge driver of her sledge, whom she wished for her protection there. This driver of sixteen horses was remarkable for two things—his unhuman appetite and his superhuman force. He ate as nothing seventeen big pies of meat before his dinner, and after this introduction enjoyed his meal enormously, as though he had eaten nothing before. His strength also was remarkable; very often he acted as a kind of human lifting-jack to raise the *Dormeuse* out of a ditch in the road into which it had fallen. His

devotion to the young lady was something touching, as she was always kind both to him and to one of her young maids, with whom this peasant Hercules was quite utterly in love.

“With these three, my young *grandmère* was shown with much politeness by the old chief into his house. There the huge driver lay down in the hall, just by the door of the room of his mistress, while the two young maids were sleeping in a room next by. Then, as she nearly always did the last thing in the evening, she began to write her diary, a book within which were witty remarks, philosophic thoughts on events of the day, or some recollections of her friends—all those together with the entries of the day’s expenses and gains, entered in such a practical way that one might suppose she had been trained in some great American bookkeeping school. That night for some time she was busily writing. Her room was closed. She had asked for the keys and had locked the three doors—one of them going to the hall, another to the room of her maids, and a third to an empty room opposite. She always did this, for she did not like to feel that she might be disturbed.

“But quite suddenly now my little *grandmère*

felt some one's presence within the room. She turned her head quickly and saw a man, clad in the monk's garb of ancient time, looking at her, while he stood quite still. He was of a medium height, she said, rather thin but still not meager, for he appeared very wiry built. His strong face was of the dark complexion; he had the large temples and eyes set deep; and it seemed to her that a bluish glow of light appeared about his brow. She was also struck at once by his peculiar shining eyes. They seemed to look inside of her—and now she felt a kind of a warmth going through her brain, she said, and also a sensation of the perfect calm and joy. Then she heard him speak to her—not aloud, for there was no sound. Only deep within herself she could hear him warning her of the mortal danger here and urging her at once to depart.

“Still curiously unalarmed, for he brought a great calm within her mind, my grandmother thanked him, in her thought, and in the same un-speaking way she told the monk that she would follow his advice immediately. She entered then into the room of her two young servants, and in some moments they came back, the three of them together, into her room to take her belongings.

When the servants saw the monk they at once kneeled down before him, and he blessed them, and went out of the room directly through the wall of the house. So in a moment he disappeared. The servants, very frightened now, rushed with the bags of their mistress out through their room to wake up the huge driver of the *Dormeuse*, and also the chief of the *cortège* and all the men, to make them to prepare for to depart immediately. The servants had scarcely left the room, in which my grandmother had stayed to gather up her papers and jewels, when the third door was bursted down, and into the room came the old village chief.

“‘So! You are writing, *barina!*’ he cried. ‘Your profits and gains you are entering, aren’t you? Now finish this quickly, and quickly make your prayer to your God!’ In his strong old hand he was holding a knife.

“But at this same moment, within the house were heard the cries of the *cortège* chief—and the old man, after a short hesitation, left the room by the way he had entered—just while the driver of the *Dormeuse* was coming quickly in from the hall. Then the old brigand’s voice was heard outside, disputing very angry with the chief of the

cortège, asking why they were making ready to leave in the middle of the night. When seeing he could not stop them with words, he made a sharp whistle, long and loud—it was the signal of alarm. In the meantime my *grandmère* went with the huge driver out through the yard of the house to the street, where she saw with relief that the sixteen horses were still in the harness to the *Dormeuse*. She entered into it at once and ordered him to fasten most carefully the two small windows and the doors. Quickly he bolted the steel plates down.

“All her men were busy with horses now and with preparation for a fight—since by then everyone of them understood that they were in a nest of brigands. My *grandmère* soon heard the old man come and with a knife try to open the windows, but in vain. For quickly she heard the chief of the train ask what the devil he was doing there and the answer that he wished to speak with the lady, and to receive from her what was due to him for the oats and hay, and food and vodka for the men—things which never had been served. The chief of the *cortège* then paid him for the beds in his houses but refused to pay any more. The in-

furiated old brigand attacked the chief now with his knife, but in the same instant he received a stupendous box on his ear from the driver of the *Dormeuse*, and at once he fell like dead to the ground.

“In the meantime the alarm had spread all over the village. From everywhere one could see how the lights began to be lit; and men, one by one, coming to the street with their axes for a fight—while the men of the *cortège* were making ready to force their way out. The villagers came rushing now—but when by the lights of the lanterns they saw their chief senseless on the ground, they were at once in dark confusion. So, without much fighting the train of sledges reached the gates. They were closed and locked, with heavy bars, but the huge driver of the *Dormeuse* lifted them up from their hinges and threw them with a crash aside. As soon as the last sledge left the gates all horses were brought to the fullest gallop, although it was still very dark. When they were already some ten kilometers from the place, the chief of the *cortège* discovered that they had taken the wrong way. Instead of going to Voronej, they were again on their old route back to

Kaluga from which they had come. When he brought his excuses to the young lady, she answered:

“ ‘It is better so—for if the brigands follow us, they will take the other road, by which you told them we would go. So now go directly back to Kaluga.’

“When they came there two days after this, my grandmother told the story to her father, who besides interrogated many of the men in her train. She begged him to investigate the doings of this village immediately and on the spot—and her father quickly did so as she asked. On the second day after Christmas a detachment of soldiers, equipped with light artillery and all the instruments for assault, galloped to the brigand place. When one of the officers of the detachment had been admitted at the gate, he was killed in the most hideous way, and his naked, mutilated body thrown over the palisade. Then the artillery fire was started at once, and the whole of the village was surrounded, not to allow anyone to escape. Soon the palisade broke down before the fire of the guns, and the attacking force rushed in. Every man, woman and child inside took an active part in the most savage fighting. The sol-

diers, some of them veterans from the Napoleonic wars, were saying that never in their lives had they faced such a fiendish enemy. House after house in the village was captured by fighting all the day and the night. All the population was set into irons—and then the soldiers bivouacked there, waiting for further instruction. Soon my great-grandfather arrived with the other members of his court, and the perquisition was begun. There was not a single house, they found, which was not overfilled with objects taken from murdered travelers. For the crimes of that village had reached back for several generations. There objects were found belonging to persons who were known to have disappeared in that province some eighty years before. Not a single one of these brigands showed any traces of moral sense. Even the children were boasting of their share in the murders done. Most of the open places within the village palisade were taken up by graves of victims; and the ferocious villagers were proud to point out every grave. They showed one great trench where forty persons had been buried all together. Not any details did they hide of their deeds.

“ ‘Now we know there is but one end for us—we shall all be hanged,’ they said. ‘So why should

we try to hide our deeds, if these things are so appetizing to the court and to your Excellence?"

"As this village belonged to the State, so it was necessary to report directly in Petersburg to the Home Office. This was done by my great-grandfather, who utilized his visit for going direct to the Emperor, begging him to sign the death verdict for the whole population of Voronihino without a single exception, no matter what the sex or age. The verdict was signed by Nicholas I, and the execution was carried out. Men and women and children were killed. Then all the houses were burned down and the place was plowed over for the next spring, so that there should remain no trace of any village on that spot. And the order of the Emperor was that no house should ever be there again.

"About one month after this, my grandmother traveled again to Voronej; the town to which she had been going on that night. After arranging her business affairs, she went to the cathedral to pray; and there she saw the *ikon* of a saint, the *Mitrofan* of Voronej, who had been dead for many years. In the picture she recognized at once the holy man who had saved her life. But she wished to have more proofs of this, and so

she went and brought her two maids, who had seen the apparition that night. She told them nothing. Only, she said, 'Now I wish you to come to the church.' But when they came and saw the *ikon*, both of them fell down on their knees and were pressing their heads upon the stones. So now the Voltairean doubts of my *grandmère* were answered.

"Fifty long years after that, when she recited this story to me, sitting in her garden here, she said at the end:

" 'You may believe or disbelieve—but do not repudiate only because you cannot explain.' She stopped and was thinking quietly. 'I am a very old woman,' she said, 'and I have seen many strange things in my life. Many, many I could not explain—but I have seen them—and I know that if you will bring all your thinking hard upon somebody you love, even if he is far away, you can feel how you are quickly going to the place wherever he is. And often he will see you then, just as though your body were there. And if we can do this while we live, I think we can do it still after we die.' She was quiet again. 'Not all of us can. Our lives must be strong. And I think that only when all our lives we have been

making our spirits strong, shall we have any **other** life when we die.'

"My little *grandmère*—so old and so small, but now so strong and stern in her eyes that I, a small boy, was watching her, much frightened and forgetting to breathe—looked down on the river very far off.

"'I think,' she said, 'that we ourselves must build up our own immortality.'

* * * * *

"So she told me, and I supposed I had heard a story very strange, but only a story, and this was the end. But the end was not so—the end was so great as my little grandmother was small. It happened that same winter time.

"When we left her here in the autumn to go back to Petersburg, my mother was troubled, for she did not trust the Polish steward of my *grandmère*, who with his wife and daughter Steshka lived as her servants in this house. He was a sly, amiable wheedler—'my Talleyrand,' she called him—but though she knew he was not very honest, still she wished to keep him here. She liked him because he was most polite, but more because he could speak French; and, living alone through

long Russian winters, she was still enamored of her France, and was pleased to speak with some one in the tongue of her 'first fatherland.' So we left her with that Pole and we went back to Petersburg, where we lived in an apartment near the Alexandrovski Park. I was sleeping with my mother there, for I was then a boy quite small. Near our house was a small factory; and early every morning when in winter it was yet quite dark, the low fearful cry of its *sirène* made me to shudder in my bed and have the ugly nightmares.

"So now one night I was awaking and began to shake again. It must be the *sirène*, I thought. But no, it was my mother, weeping and rapidly dressing herself, beside a candle burning there. Frightened, now I lay quite still, and soon I heard how she went from the room to the kitchen and fired the oven there, and then aroused the servant girl to go to the posting station at once and bring a sleigh for the long journey to the home of my *grandmère*. The girl ran out, and my mother began preparing breakfast for herself—but no matter how quietly she moved, my father in his room awoke, and I heard him ask if she would go to the early service in the church. Then I heard her answer:

“‘No. My mother has been here.’ And when my father came into the kitchen, I heard her describe how she had been sleeping badly and was wide awake when she saw Nadine Constantinovna quietly come into the room, and sit down in the large armchair, and after asking steadily if everything was well with ourselves, she said, ‘But with me it is not well. I am very ill, and they have so arranged that no one is permitted to see me. They think they will steal everything—and because I shall soon be dead, there will be no witness of their deed. I lie not in my bedroom but on the lounge in the corner room. They have brought me there, as they suppose my money is in my bedroom, where they now make most thorough search. So come at once. I am still alive, but soon I shall die and I wish you here.’

“Then I heard my father, who was a very quiet man, say, ‘Go, if you feel it necessary—and if you find there nothing wrong, come back as quickly as you can.’ Then, while he helped to pack her belongings, I heard my mother beg him to excuse that she was going so—on account of a mere vision—which seemed to be ridiculous.

“But some days after she had gone, there came from her a letter telling that *grandmère* was dead and urging us to come at once. In spite of this so

terrible news, we children were quite glad to go—for with healthy children grief is often but skin deep; and I remember very well our joy in that long sleigh ride—twelve hours over snow and ice. When at last we came to this house, the little dead body of my *grandmère* was lying with the candles, and many, many peasants, and land-owners and river folk were going on tip-toes in and out. Then my mother, bit by bit, recited to us how she had come in the early evening to this house, and how the Pole and his daughter and wife were at once uneasy and alarmed when her sleigh came into the yard. But disgusted with their fawning talk and all their kissing of her cloak, she had entered into the corner room, and there, quietly lying, she saw my *grandmère*, who said:

“ ‘It is well. So you followed my call and came with all speed. Who drove you, my dear?’ And when she learned it was Stepan Timovéev, she said, ‘That is well. He is an honest driver and his horses are of the best. Now go and eat and drink something at once to warm you—else you may be ill. Give something to Stepan as well, but do not let him have the vodka without eating—else he will be drunk. And you must keep him in the house for protection from these miscreants.’

“ ‘This order my mother obeyed at once, for my

little *grandmère* was always like that—managing in a most practical way, and all must be done as she had directed. When my mother returned, she said:

“‘So you are here. Better write at once to your husband that he shall bring the children now—for it takes some days for the letter to go, and so they will only have time to arrive for my funeral. I know I shall die, and that this is unavoidable. Later I shall explain to you why—but first I must settle my affairs, for soon it will be hard for me to keep all my thinking clear. So go to my room, and in the third drawer of my large cabinet you will find and bring me all papers concerning my property and also my pension money from the State.’

“When this was done she gave full and careful directions how such papers should be transferred to my mother’s name. When this had been written in a will, she sent for some neighbors to come and witness. And only when all business was finished in such proper form and she was alone with my mother again, did my *grandmère* recite in full of the disaster to herself. While inspecting a barn she had builded that autumn, she fell on some steps to a scaffold and broke two of her ribs

by the fall. Half-unconscious, she was brought into the house by the Pole, and was placed in this corner room. Then, growing conscious, she heard how they searched for her money and jewels in her room, while she was left without any aid. She called her commands but they did not come. As the pain from her broken ribs grew worse, with great effort she rose and opened the window to gather some snow and make a compress. But so little and very old she was, and weakened by much pain in her chest, she could not close the window down. The wind like ice came into the room, and soon her lungs grew all inflamed. In the meantime the Pole and his daughter and wife were searching the house from attic to cellar—and when several neighbors came, my *grandmère* heard these servants say, ‘Yes, she had a little fall. She is much better now, but a little weak, and wishes very much to rest. She asks to admit no visitors now.’

“So my grandmother was left alone. ‘When the first fever passed,’ she said, ‘I grew quite calm—for now I knew that certainly I could not live. But I did not wish to die alone, so in the night I strongly resolved to go to you—and this I did. Bringing together all my thoughts, in fancy I put

on my fur coat, and so went out and down to the village and along the river road. Quite clearly I saw every village I passed; for if one was not clear I knew at once I should fail in my plan—so I kept my fancy calm and strong, to see clearly each place as I passed by. At last I came to the Neva, and followed the road across the ice, and so into Petersburg.’ Step by step, she told the route of her journey through the city streets. ‘And then,’ she said, ‘I reached your house and came to your room, told you quite clearly of my disaster and of my wishes. And then I came back. And when again I was here in this bed, though now very tired, I was quite sure that you would come. And so it happened and all is well. Now I wish that there shall be no vulgar scandal over the crime of this wretched Pole and his *famille*. Let them immediately depart. Their punishment is going to be the death of their spirits when they die. For now I know quite clearly that only people whose spirits are strong, and unstained by such dirtiness of the soul, will have any existence above the grave. But you must not sorrow now for me—for by the life that I have lived, I have decided my future state. My spirit shall not die, my dear.’

"So, quite calm and undismayed, my grandmother lost her consciousness—and soon her body grew cold and dead.

"But never shall I forget the scene as her long funeral *cortège* was going to the village church. No sixty huge sledges with armed guards, like that she had when a young girl—but many, many people came; the line wound down along the hill—rich neighbors and peasants, old and young, from villages many versts away. For Nadine Constantinovna, although her life had descended in scale to a house as rude as this, had shown such force of spirit here that she was esteemed and feared, on account of her extraordinary holding to the truth and right—to that justice with the iron hands dealt by her father long ago. This she dealt to the villages here in a way which made the peasants call her 'the Lady General.' They knew she would punish not only their crimes but still more those of the local police and dishonest officials of any kind. So soon as any injustice was done, at once she went to Petersburg, where she still had friends quite near the Tzar; and there she would not grow quiet again till prosecution had been made. So now when their protectress was dead, many peasants were weeping—while

there were some, both peasants and those in authority, too, who displayed a kind of sad relief that now they were free to continue their crimes.

"I remember one such a weeper there—a huge river hooligan. Once he had been a drunken brute, and when meeting her at the fall of night he had wished to kill her with his ax. She had looked at him severely and said, 'Now go at once to the police and tell them what you wished to do!' And so terrible was the force in her eyes, that the fellow had quickly crossed himself for the protection of his soul, and had gone to the *ispravnik* and told how he had tried to kill and rob the little Lady General. Then in the jail she had pardoned him and brought it about that he was free. But she ordered him never to drink again and always be a man *comme il faut*. Since then he had worked for many years without any *peccadilo* here. And now he followed her to the grave.

"But as the small body of my *grandmère* went through the snow deep into the ground, I was not breathing with my awe. For suddenly into my boy's mind came the words she had told to my mother here—'My spirit shall not die, my dear.' And I was asking where she had gone?"

THE LITTLE DARK MAN

THE LITTLE DARK MAN

"I am going to tell you a story," said my Russian friend on another night, "which will give you a glimpse of the little dark man whose figure will soon be more plainly seen in many countries of the world. And then he will look quite enormously large—even in America."

My curiosity was stirred. When I asked what he meant by the little dark man, he smiled at me and answered:—

"If I should try to tell you, I would be talking all the night, for this chap has appeared in so many forms, since men began asking 'What is the life?' In the Middle Ages he grew quite large, and they called him Saint or Sorcerer. Then came modern science and smiled at him; and as men smiled he grew small to their eyes, so small that soon those scientists forgot him—like God, whom they also denied. But now I think he will grow again. So large will he grow at the

end of this war that soon you will hear the millions of greatly puzzled people inquire, 'Who is this psychic gentleman? He is doing the strange things. How does he do them?' they will ask. And the orthodox atheist, sharply annoyed, will have to find some way to reply. . . . But all this time while he was so dim to those learned people in the towns, to the simple peasants of our land he has always been quite real. And my story to-night is of such peasants, and of one who lived among them, and of a thing that I saw with my eyes. So now I shall tell—and at first you will hear a story beginning not strangely at all, but just very human, very Russian."

He smiled again, and so began. And the tale that he told I shall try to repeat in his own words, as he told it to me.

"Surely we shall be too late! Make haste, go on!" my mother cried, although it was more than five hours yet before the train to Petrograd could possibly reach the station to which we were driving. For my mother always loved to be "a little before" a train. In all our trips, though I did my best to be as slow as possible, never could I manage so that we reached the station less than

some two hours before the arrival of the train. And knowing this, our peasant driver only smiled when she implored him to be going like the wind.

"Barina," he said, "we shall have three hours still to wait, if the train is not late. But God only knows how late it will be. The last time it was fully six hours behind; so perhaps you will sit at the station all through the day and through the night."

"Go on—oh, please!" my poor mother cried. So with an indignant grunt, the peasant beat his horses to the splendid gallop; and so we were going until at last we stopped with a jerk in the mud and snow before the gate to the station yard. "Thank God, now we are in time!" declared my mother with content, while I went into the station to inquire about the train. Never in all my life have I heard of any train so far behind! Somewhere in Holy Russia it was, and this was all that I could learn. Many hours at least we should be here. I was in the despair, which was still increased when soon I found that the station buffet was hopelessly closed. The whole place was filled with emptiness!

I strolled upon the platform then, and at last discovered at one end a single living creature there

—a blond and tall, quite nicely built young peasant woman, cleanly dressed, who sat immovable, calm like a cow. It seemed to me I had seen her before; but where, at first I could not guess. Then suddenly I recollected. Yes, this was the nice young woman I met not long ago on my way to Okuneff's, a neighbor of mine whose small estate was about fifty versts from our home. I had talked with her then, so I had learned that she was from the village of Bor; and now I was glad that I had discovered someone with whom my good mother could talk, since I knew that she did not like to be mute for any considerable length of time. So I brought the girl to her and said that here was a nice young woman from Bor. One glance of the keen pleased interest, and my mother knew at once that this young woman would soon have a child. So with full speed the gossip began; and in perhaps two hours, with never any silence at all, we knew all about this woman's life—not only her name, but the names of all her relatives and all her friends, and all their lives from year to year, as though we ourselves were born in Bor. And only when she had recounted all this, did Maria quietly tell to us how early this morning she had come there, and already was on the train when off she

ran to the buffet to fetch some hot water for her tea. The train went off while she was there—and her luggage was now in Petrograd! At once my mother, in full dismay, was convinced it would be stolen there; but the girl Maria quite calmly replied:

“No, Barina, such a thing cannot be. Do you see? I am poor and with child, and my husband is sick from a wound in the war. Will he live or not, God only knows. So how could there be any people so bad, who would steal from such a girl as me, who goes to see her husband in Petrograd where he may die?”

But my good mother's concern increased. Earnestly turning to me, she implored, “Junechka, please—explain to her that there *are* such people in Petrograd—that the luggage men are scoundrels there. Perhaps she will believe you, since you are a man.”

But just because I was a man, off I walked from this hopeless talk. I walked and walked, the time went on, and at last arrived the train in the night.

By now my anxious mother resolved to take the girl with us, second class, since she had learned that Maria knew nobody in Petrograd except her husband, Peter, who was in a lazaret. On the

train she gave us a letter from him—a most typical one—many peasants write so:—

“To our deeply esteemed wife, Maria Sidorovna, we send our greetings of the husband. I am ill in Petrograd in the lazaret N. 423, so please come quickly to me there. Give our greetings to——” and then followed the names of all the relatives, friends, and persons of village acquaintance, placed in the hierarchical order.

The letter at last was finished:

“And pray to accept our blessings of the husband for your good success—which blessing is good until the coffin.”

In the station at Petrograd, where we arrived at the end of the night, I found at last the conductor of the early morning train, and soon, to my enormous surprise, the luggage of the girl was found. When he brought to Maria her huge bag, she took it without astonishment, quite calmly as a matter of course. “Surely,” he said with the curious smile, “you must be a girl from the North, where the people live without locks on their doors!” I paid the man five roubles for the trouble he took not to steal the bag, and then my mother asked Maria to come along with us that

day and be safe from all the scoundrels. Without confusion the girl replied, "Thanks." And she quietly climbed into the sledge.

It was now early in the dawn, but as we passed so many great houses, palaces, and God knows what, Maria looked calmly at them all and showed not even the small surprise, though never once yet in her life had she visited any town, and the only stone building she had seen was the little church in Bor, which was some seven centuries old. "This is a town. Then it must be so," was the thought in her eyes, and nothing else. Like the splendid healthy ox she was! When we came to our lodging, Maria at once felt herself here quite at home, as though she had been years long with us. While eating some bread and sipping the tea, she now continued to us her tale. Her husband, she told, had been a soldier already for two years in the war. They had taken him off when he was eighteen. All the time near Riga he had been, digging many trenches there, "so that men could be saved from the bullets," she said. Eight months ago, he was with her in Bor for a few days; then away he went—and not until now had she received any news of him.

Then, while I went to the telephone to ask the

address of the lazaret, Maria was carefully making herself fit for her great visit that day—"to my deeply esteemed husband," she said. She displayed before my mother the contents of her enormous bag. It was quite a museum of village fine art—the laces made with needles so fine, and with such perfect taste, that they could easily compare with that coming from Venice, my mother declared. Then came the fine and silk-like linen, spun in the home, some snowy white and some with faded green and pink woven into it in such a way, and with a feeling of color so fine, that it was quite a wonder to see! My mother's good eyes came out of her head! With dry reproach she looked at me, and said,—

"You have been many times to Bor! Were you always sleeping there, that you never saw such needlework, to buy some and to bring to me? This is exactly the way of a man!"

My position grew most unpleasant now. My God! And in order to save myself, I made the heroic proposition to make a special journey to Bor at once and fetch all the stuff I could buy.

While I was telling this splendid resolve, Maria at last was ready to start—quite in her best attire now, with her fair thick hair all shined with oil

and tightly coiffed. "My own husband I am going to see, so I must be at my best," she said. Our *dvornik* fetched for her a sledge, and off on the dirty snow of the street she drove away to the lazaret.

In about two hours back she came—quite terribly silent, with not a trace of the calm animation she had shown when she was preparing herself for the visit. She sat a long time so deeply sad that it was a woe to look at her. Her husband was so ill, she said, the doctors even did not allow him to speak any word with his own wife. On the train from the front, I soon understood, the poor devil had caught a pneumonia, and now there was faint hope he could survive. Two-thirds of his lungs did not breathe, she told us. Still not a tear, nor any complaint. Silently she took off her fine clothes. She asked of my mother, "Where is the church?" And off she went to pray to the God.

Now I telephoned to the lazaret to find if nothing could be done; but they told me her husband was ill quite long, and was weak before the pneumonia came. Now he lived only by breathing the pure oxygen from the tank. No hope at all. Perhaps two days would be the longest time for him. . . . Well, poor lad—another one dead. But death

was so common in Russia now, that soon I dropped him off my mind, and went to attend to the business for which I had come to Petrograd. I accomplished it that afternoon; then, having nothing urgent to do, in order to please my mother I decided to go back to Bor and buy some linen and laces there, and also perhaps have a nice long chat with my friend Okuneff, who lived near by.

So I took the train from the city that night; and the next day, after quite a long drive over the clean white snow of a road through the silent forest of huge pines, I came to the little village which was the girl Maria's home. Soon I discovered the hut where she lived, and found her younger sister there. She was a lass of perhaps sixteen, a nice-looking girl with brown-golden eyes, thick chestnut hair, and finely built—but silent, silent like a fish. I explained to her the bad news about Peter, and also why I had come to Bor; and of course I mentioned that I was going to see my old friend Okuneff near by. This was to make my credit higher—since no peasant likes to sell or have trade with a person unknown to him.

The girl had listened silently both to the news of Peter and also to my business talk; but now,

when I said I would go to Okuneff, without any word she went from the hut and soon returned with a neighbor woman, to whom she explained what had to be done, while she was away from the home that day. "Well, my swallow, well, my birdie, I will do so," the neighbor agreed.

When the compact was made, and not before, did the young girl calmly ask of me if she might go in my sledge to Okuneff's.

"There is plenty of room, you see, and I will take but small space," she said. "And if Peter is so ill, I must go at once to a very old man who is living now in the house of your friend, the Barin Okuneff. So please to make for me this grace."

Of course I agreed, and we started away. We traveled about twenty versts, and this girl at my side was silent still as any fish could possibly be. I learned her name, Pelageia—but not another word from her could I draw out along the road. In the concentrated way she sat, as if she thought of something.

What it was I did not know—and as I looked at her I guessed that not even she herself knew her thoughts. So at last we came to Okuneff's estate. Exceedingly glad to see me there, at once in his stentorian voice he cried:—

“Juvenal Vassilievich arrived! Now make for us a big fish-pie! Be quick as possible! Don’t forget to serve the nice *zakooski*, too!”

And then followed the further orders which he shouted from his room down to the kitchen far below.

That was a splendid feast we had. With the appetites of heroes we consumed appalling heaps of food. After dinner we slept a bit—about two hours—and when again I came into the front room of the house, I saw the girl Pelageia there, sitting with a little old man who was dressed in the black garb of a monk. He was wiry, thin, and quite white-haired; but he had the strong, determined face, and a tremendous force was felt both in his voice and in his eyes—though his manner was quite humble and his speech was very low. The girl must have been telling him about Maria’s husband; for when I entered, the little old man rose and greeted me, and began to ask intently in detail what I had heard from the doctors about Peter’s hopeless case. When I had explained, he asked as well all about the lazaret—just where it was in Petrograd, how large, how many rooms it had, and just where was Peter’s bed. He inquired as though he himself were intending to go

and see the sick man there. When all this information he had, he thanked me and rose and went to his room.

Then I asked my friend Okuneff who was this little holy man? He answered me that now for some time the old fellow had lived within his house, and that he was glad to have him there—so quiet and good he always was, so little trouble did he make. He stayed most of the time alone in his room, and his meals were the water and the rye bread—only rarely a dish of sauerkraut with sunflower oil, which he took as a feast. The strange healing-power he sometimes had; many peasants had been cured by him. So much for his case. With Okuneff I soon forgot about him now, and all evening long we talked of the war—of prices, how they rose and rose; and of new laws by the government, each one more stupid than the last—or not so stupid, rather done by the German influence at court, to bring all our trade and industries down. So, after this good cheerful talk, which most Russians like so well, finally we went to bed.

The next day, when leaving Okuneff's house, I saw the old man of the night before. He said, in the low and quiet voice, "I attended to the trouble

of Peter, and I received news that now all will go well."

I smiled to myself. For how could such a simple old man travel six hundred versts in a night to the lazaret where Peter lay? I went into my sledge with Pelageia, and we started back to Bor. Though she had heard what the old man said, she took it quite as a matter of course. She was rather communicative now, and explained to me that it would be hard to buy the linen and laces in Bor; for the women did not like to sell except in the cases exceedingly rare. Too much toil their stuff had cost. But still she would try to persuade them to sell to me something, if only a little. Very calmly on she talked. Long ago some merchants had bought the lace in Bor, she said, but could not sell it in the big towns, because the ladies there preferred to buy the laces foreign-made. "For to them it was the shocking taste to wear anything made in Russia!" she said. So now her friends and neighbors in Bor were quite indignant that their fine work should be refused for the bad lace made with machines in Germany; Pelageia spoke of those ladies in towns, most heartily despising them all! "No self-respecting Barina," she said, "would wear such trash from Germany!"

But about the little old man she did not say a single word. And when I asked if she thought he would help, the girl replied, "It is not a good thing to speak of the *Starzy* (Holy Man)."

In Bor, through her aid, I bought what I could. Of all the money which I had I spared only enough for the ticket—third class—and so I went back to Petrograd. But when I arrived with my linen and laces, I found the girl Maria still there; and to my enormously great chagrin, my mother would barely look at this stuff! Instead, she began to tell me now of a most strange adventure which they have had while I was gone. A little old man, in the garb of a monk or of a pilgrim, came to them. Though all the doors were closed, she told, without trouble or sound he entered silently into the room where they were sitting; and after greeting Maria, he said, "I have been to your Peter and talked with him, and have found that now he will soon be quite well."

Then quickly and strangely he went away. . . . While my mother told this tale, I saw the girl Maria looking intently at my face, as if she were asking, "And what do *you* know?" But I told them nothing yet of the man that I had seen at Okuneff's house. In the great interest and surprise I began

to question both of them, and soon they were disagreeing as to many small details—just how he looked, just what he said. But the general story was the same. The next morning, they told me, they went to see Peter.

“And really, Junechka, the boy was much better!” my excited mother declared. “He breathed quite well without oxygen now—but still was too weak to say anything more than that he had seen an old man there—and that now all would be well with him!”

With all my curiosity stirred, I went the next day to the lazaret—and there I found Peter so much improved that he could talk quite easily and listen to what I had to tell. I did not speak of the little old man; I only told how I had gone to his village and seen his wife’s young sister there. With the calm interest of the peasant, Peter listened to my talk. At last I asked him how it was that he was feeling better now—and then he said very quietly:

“One came to me two nights ago.”

“Who came to you? What do you mean?” I asked. “No visitors can come here in the night. Perhaps you were sleeping and had a dream.”

“No, I was awake,” he replied. “But I was

lying in the state where you cannot say, 'Here is life—there is death'—because you can feel yourself just between. And this was very hard for me. I did not know what I should do. Should I ask for the death and pray for my soul, or should I be begging the God for my life and thinking of my family? I grew quite tired with such thoughts, and all the fighting in my chest. But I cannot say that I was asleep, for I saw all about me quite clearly and well, and I heard how the Sister beside my bed was saying, 'Look, now, how he plays with his hands, always drawing the blanket up to his chin. That is the sure sign of death.' So I lay and I listened. So quiet I grew that now it was quite the same to me, whether I lived or whether I died. She dropped her needle. I opened my eyes and watched how she stooped and tried to find it on the floor. 'Will she find it,' I asked, 'before I die?' She found it soon, and drew her chair a little closer to my bed—and now she was sewing quietly here. 'Now,' I thought, 'in this long war, she is so used to see men die. What is she sewing?' I watched her still.

"Then something pulled upon my thoughts, and I turned my face toward the door. And I saw, at first dimly, then quite clear, how there had entered

a little old man in the dark robe of Holy Church, his face quite bright, a happy one, yet quiet, too, with the deep strength of joy and peace within his soul streaming from him like the light. So he came and looked at me with a good smile. 'Good day, Peter,' he said. 'You will soon be much better. I have heard that you are ill, so I have gone and inquired for you, and learned you will recover soon. You must pray to the God for recovery.' I replied to him, 'For what should I pray—when I cannot tell which is life, which is death? I am lying between.' Then he said to me, 'You must pray to the God at once for the life! You are still a young man and you have a young wife, and soon there will be a child for you, too! A fine strong boy he is going to be! What reason have you to think of the death? You are going to pray to live, my boy!' Then he told to me how I should pray, and I repeated it, word by word. While I was talking, I heard the good Sister, who sat sewing still at my side, say very softly, 'Now the poor man is saying a burial prayer for himself.' I looked around to smile at her then—and when I looked back, the old man was gone.

"Then I fell asleep and slept all of the night.

The next day the Sister looked at me and said, 'You were the funny man last night! Quickly you turned and began to speak with somebody who was not here! And then you began to pray to the God.' I said to the Sister, 'But did you not see the old man who came and spoke to me?' She laughed and took hold of my hand and said, 'Well, well, if there was, or there was not—do not let it trouble you! I am glad that you are better now!' Then she went and brought the doctor here; and when he came, he was much surprised. Barely could he believe his own eyes that I was not a dead man to-day. And he said to me, 'Peter—you are the bull! The strong and lusty bull you must be!' So said the learned doctor. But look at me, Barin, if I am the bull."

Peter drew off his blanket and opened his shirt. And he was like a skeleton very closely clad in skin!

"The Sister told to the doctor then," he continued quietly, "how I spoke with someone who was not here—though of course he was here, as I have said. She told to the doctor, too, how I prayed. Then he asked, 'How was his fever last night?' It was under the normal, the Sister replied; and she told how close I was to the death.

Now the doctor understood all, and he said, 'Just so it was. The poor fellow was mad. For in such a crisis, when the soul does not know whether to stay or depart, often the man will grow quite mad, and see what is not in the room.' So I listened, and I thought, 'Now of course it must be so—for he is the very learned man. How many dead men have slipped through his hands! The great experience he has had! He must be right! So I am mad.' But soon again I fell asleep, and when I awoke I grew better still. And now I do not think I am mad—and I feel that soon I will return to my home."

He grew tired then and could talk no more. Quietly closing his eyes he said, "Tell me, please, Barin, about my home—all that you saw while you were there. Was the horse in the stable? Or has my wife been forced to sell him in this damned war?"

"Yes, the horse was there," I replied. "But now I will tell you something else." And I told how the girl Pelageia went with me to Okuneff's house, and how she was begging the old man there to pray that Peter should not die, and how the old man on the next day told that he had looked into the matter and that now all would be well. At

this, Peter grew most solemnly silent; and when I had finished, he remarked,

“So—so it was. Pelageia went to the *Starzy* there. She is the good kind clever girl—she knew to whom to go for help; and now I know who it was that came. I will recover surely now.”

Then he plucked at my arm; and when I bent down, he whispered:—

“Only, Barin—please—do not speak of this to the doctors here! For they are the quite learned men! They can make a man die with one little pill! And if they knew what we are talking, for me it would soon be dangerously bad! For they think I am mad! They do not know! They live in such cities—so large, so large, and filled with so many learned books—that they cannot grasp our very plain and simple little village ways! So let us just slip away from them!”

Ten days later, with his wife, Peter went calmly back to his home—as though nothing strange had happened at all. We heard no more from them for a month—and then the girl Pelageia, almost as silent as before, came to our lodgings with quite a huge bag of linen and laces, which she and Maria had made for my mother, as a gift. And she told us that Maria had just given birth to a son.

STORIES THAT HIS UNCLE TOLD

STORIES THAT HIS UNCLE TOLD

On still another evening, as I sat with my Russian friend in the rude little studio where his celebrated father had once painted pictures of peasant life, it did not seem as though this home would much longer be secure; for from the dark river below shouts and occasional rifle shots made it plain that the river folk down there were almost ready now to rise. But my host was imperturbable, as he had been all these days of my visit.

"Yes—of course—it will come," he said, "and there will be a great confusion—quite a hell, all over Russia. Now I will continue to give you my picture of real Russian life—not revolution and stormy noises, but the deep waters down below—for these are the real life of our nation, and they will not *au fond* be changed by working people in the towns. I will tell you some of the stories my uncle told when I was a boy. For Russia is a country of peasants—fields and forests, lakes and rivers—very quiet—here the life is very deep. And my uncle's stories were like that.

"My uncle, Fedor Maximovich, was a dark little man with a hump on his back. He was a man exceedingly poor—but if my father would try to help him, always he was answering, 'But why should you help me? My life is quite good—I am happy—I am well content.' He was a tailor, and all his life he traveled about in villages. To peasants' and fishermen's homes he went, to stitch the clothes; and while he stitched, always he was listening to the stories that they told. For as my father all his life was looking at peasants in order to paint them, so my uncle was looking, looking, to see into the life of their souls. Deep and strange were some of the stories, but some were exceedingly comic ones, too."

Half the night my friend recounted these tales. I shall try to repeat a few of them here, in his own words, as he told them to me :

* * * * *

"In a village not far from here," said my uncle, "once there was a *muzhik* who said many times a day to his wife, 'The work that I do is fearfully hard—while yours is only the play for a child. The smallest brat could do what you do, but for my great toil there is needed a man!'"

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"After hearing this many thousand times, the wife, who was quiet and small like a mouse, at last proposed to him to change. For one day she would try to do all his 'great toil,' while he would be doing her 'play' in the house. The big *muzhik* agreed—but wisely he pondered, and then he said, 'We will do it next week.' And now he left all his work to pile up, so that his small wife would have quite enough and would feel how hard a life he had. But the woman meanwhile in the house did all her work quite nicely there, for she said to herself, 'He will surely bungle everything and leave me a terrible mess to clean up—so now I must do all I can.' So she did, and at last the day arrived. Then out the small woman went to the forest, and chopped the wood and brought it home—where the man was shouting to the baby, 'When in God's name will you go to sleep?' Then she went to the barn to thresh the rye, and this she did also, short and well—while the man came chasing the little red dog that had run away with a small piece of meat. And so did the woman all the day long.

"But now the *muzhik* sat thinking gravely how he must bring the great brains of a man to make simple these little woman's tasks. So at last he

wisely thought it out. To the child's cradle he fastened a cord, and this he tied to the mortar, so that he could rock the cradle while he was also pounding the gruel. And to keep the dog from stealing the meat, he fastened him to the mortar, too. Then, as he worked in this wise man's way, he saw how a vulture up in the sky was coming down into the yard. So at once he went out and called all the chickens and quickly and strongly fastened them all together by a cord, so that when the vulture thief arrived he would be unable to carry them off. Smiling quite broadly now with content, he was going back to his easy toil—when he heard from the stable how the old cow, whom he had quite forgotten to milk, was bellowing very loud for the aid. So he went to the stable to milk her now. But when he came back into the house, he saw how the smoke came out from the oven—and there he found the bread burning inside. This he grabbed and ran out behind the barn, to hide the evidence of his skill. But while he was there, the vulture came down; and finding the chickens nicely tied, he began to eat all their brains, one by one. Then came the man shouting and chased him away—with such yells that the dog within the house thought there must be thieves out there.

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So out he ran, dragging the mortar and cradle and baby all behind!

"Then at last the small wife very quietly came out from her work within the barn—and from that day on to the time of her death, she had a peaceful quiet home."

* * * * *

"But sometimes," said my little uncle, after some stitching without any talk, "even men are also wise." And he was smiling down at his work. "In the village of Chernavino," he said, "lived two brothers named Tobanov. One was Peter, the other Ivan. They were shrewd hard working *muzhiks* and they were living very well. But for them the hospitality was like the very religion of Christ; they were welcoming anyone as their brother into their house to eat and drink—till all their neighbors knew quite well that if anyone came he would be well fed, and soon made drunk on the home brewed ale. They kept many sheep, so that huge mutton chops were quite a common dish with them; and they were such splendid fishermen, too, that there was plenty of caviar, and salmon and sturgeon and fish of all kinds.

"But now some gypsies heard of this, and came

to the house and were welcomed there. And when they traveled along again, they were telling other gypsies, 'In Chernavino are two men who treat all men like brothers.' So it was not long before the gypsy bands were coming and coming, eating and eating. And Ivan and Peter were thinking and thinking—what to do? Each one had taken the vow to the God that he would welcome any guest—but now they saw they would soon be poor. So after they had been thinking long, again two gypsies came to the door. And then said Peter to Ivan,

“ ‘Again we must welcome our dear guests. But I shall tell you how we shall do. I will take one—he will be my guest; you take the other one—he will be yours.’

“So each one welcomed in his guest and talked to him like a brother and friend—till soon they came to the dinner time. Now all the table was filled with good things—caviar, fish both boiled and baked, mutton, pies of cabbage, and other pies of gruel and pork. Also very much to drink. It only remained to cut the bread. So Peter, who was growing now so exceedingly fond of his guest that he must keep close by his side, said,

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“ ‘Brother Ivan, now pass me the knife—to cut some bread first for my dear guest.’

“ ‘Your guest first?’ Ivan replied. ‘Now wait a bit! I, too, have my guest, and I have vowed that no one shall be sooner served than he!’ So with the knife he was cutting the bread, on which to serve caviar to his dear friend. But cried Peter, as he seized the knife,

“ ‘What to me is your damned guest, that he should be served in front of mine?’

“ ‘What to me is yours?’ cried Ivan. ‘Sooner than mine should be made to wait, I shall be knocking your guest down!’

“ ‘What? Knock him down?’ cried Peter. ‘My guest? Now, by the resurrection of Christ, will I do the same to yours!’ And he gave to Ivan’s gypsy a fearful blow upon the ear.

“ ‘You will beat my guest?’ cried Ivan, very angry. ‘Now, by Heaven, so will I yours!’ And Peter’s guest received a blow that sent him tumbling to the wall!

“So thus did Peter and Ivan, each angry to protect his guest, knock about the other one—so quickly and so fearfully that soon both gypsies flew from the door and fell upon the dusty road.

Then those beaten gypsies quickly traveled far away—and to all their friends they said,

“ ‘In Chernavino are two men who treat all men like brothers. And each is so quick to defend his guest that he will kick the other one far out into Holy Russia! Better not to go to that house!’ ”

* * * * *

“This fight,” said my uncle, after some stitching, with a twinkling in his eyes, “makes me to remember the very terrible battle which I saw one night between Father Hierofont and the bear.

“Father Hierofont was a village church deacon who lived not far away from your home. He was an enormous man. Like a great barrel he was shaped—though never perhaps has a barrel been made so huge and weighing so much as he. The bear hunting, of course, was not his profession—but always he liked to go anywhere, hunting or fishing, to be apart from his little, thin, and peevish wife, who never would let him eat and drink so much as he craved, for the good of his soul. So naturally each hunting trip for him was quite a splendid feast. And so it was when he came with me.

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"We were going to hunt the bear from the 'roost'—a platform of poles close by the path where the bears would come to drink in the night. When we climbed the ladder to our roost, the huge Deacon pulled up a stupendous bag and opened it. And here was vodka, in the old-fashioned green-glass bottles—about two gallons of it he had. Also plenty of boiled eggs and ham, and fish smoked and baked and salted, salted cucumbers, and plenty more. One might have supposed from the size of Father Hierofont's feast that we intended to stay on the roost for many days. But this was not all. The second man, a veteran hunter, had brought as his share a fine provision of smoked game and quite a load of spirits, too, while I had brought two bottles of cognac and some caviar and bread. So now, when Father Hierofont saw such fine provisions for the night, he was bellowing the joyous songs—until the hunter begged him to be quiet as a little mouse—else no bears would come to us. The good Deacon stopped all singing then, and with all the power of his soul he began to eat and drink. Now in the forest all was still; on the roost it grew exceedingly dark. A fresh autumn wind was softly blowing. We warmed ourselves with food and drink.

From this we all grew drowsy, and finally I fell asleep.

“But almost in the morning-time I was shocked by the stupendous voice of Father Hierofont from beneath, begging most energetically the hunter down there to let him sleep and leave him in peace, for the sake of the saints; and if this were insufficient, then for the sake of all devils, too! Greatly astonished, I looked down, and I saw a scene worthy of primeval times. Father Hierofont was lying on the huge old bear down there, as upon a sofa bed, while the hunter was begging him to stand up and allow him to disembowel the beast. When at last the good Deacon understood that he was not at home but in the forest, that this was not his bed but a bear, and that the hunter was not his wife—then he rose up and crossed himself, and repeated in most solemn voice :

“ ‘Miraculous are Thy works, O God!’

“In the same moment, now quite awake, he remarked that not possibly could we have drunk all the reserves that we had brought; and so at once he re-started to drink, while still praising God’s miraculous works. The hunter in the meantime swiftly disemboweled the bear and went away to fetch a sledge, for the path was so rough that no-

body could bring any wagon here. Soon he returned with some *muzhiks* driving two horses with a sledge; and first of all they looked at the scene and consulted how the thing could have been done. For the dead bear had not been shot! What had killed him? Then said the hunter:

“ ‘I was asleep up on the roost when I heard a most fearful crash and roar—and so soon as I jumped and looked over the edge, there was the Deacon below on the bear!’

“So now at last we understood that the bear, when going on the path, had collided in the dark against the two poles of the roost under Father Hierofont’s end, so at once this end of the roost was tipping, and the enormous Deacon asleep crashed down on the beast and bursted him!

“Father Hierofont, who had been breakfasting now mainly on the alcohol, was ready for bed once more again. So we made him to sit down on the sledge by his dead victim; and as we moved along through the forest, the Deacon in his huge deep voice was solemnly singing ‘*de profundis*.’ But when at last we came near to his home, he grew quiet and rose and walked by the sledge; and now, while thinking about his wife, he was saying in a most serious tone:

“ ‘Nenila Fedorovna—ah, how astonished she will be—that I killed such a monster!’

“When we came to the house, his thin little wife was looking with the deep fright at the bear, and could not grasp how it had been killed, for no part of the fur had been damaged. But Father Hierofont piously said:

“ ‘Wonderful are Thy works, O God!’ ”

* * * * *

This was my uncle's last story that night, because I had to go to bed. But on the next evening I came early here and begged for more tales. I asked him to tell me another story about a bear. So my uncle was thinking, and then he said:

“But this is not a funny tale. It is about a man very strange, who lived in a forest not farther from here than I could be walking in one week. It was one of those great forests which belong to our Little Father, the Czar, and this man was a forest guard. He was stern looking, and never he spoke unless it was quite needful, and every year he grew more mute. No wonder, for he lived always alone. His hut and his stable, all under one roof, he had builded of the huge thick logs,

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as though for some time everlasting. More like a little fortress it was; and everywhere was the clean perfect order, for Alexey Titoff was a most neat and orderly man. He never drank and he never disputed; but in all the villages near, the peasants both disliked and feared him, for without mercy he punished at once any theft within the forest. He did not allow them even to gather mushrooms there.

“ ‘You say you are collecting only mushrooms,’ he would reply, ‘but the devil knows you may be planning how to hunt or to steal timber, in the winter soon to come. Besides, the forest is safer without you, for when nobody but me is here, then I know no fires are made.’

“So always he would drive them out, and soon no peasants came any more. And Alexey liked it better so. He was quite content when from sunrise to dark he could walk through the forest alone, never meeting anyone or hearing any shouts or songs.

“So alone he was there for all his life. The ground close around his house he surrounded with a huge palisade, to make a yard where his horse and cows and sheep might be safe from wild animals. He had almost no meadow there. His

fodder he bought in the villages, or got it, with sugar and tea and rye flour, in trade for the honey and butter which he took to village stores. He was a good forester. So well he knew the forest that even in the darkest night he could go through and never be lost—for some such men have a strange second sight. But naturally the peasants thought he did this with the help of devils. More than once, when I came that way and saw his little horse and cart in front of a village *tracter* (tea house and store), some old woman would tell me how she had seen him sitting in the forest and speaking with quite a crowd of devils, some of them large and some so small as forest mice. The old woman had seen them quite clearly, she said. Yes, he was a dark strange man—and so the peasants left him alone.

“But now I will tell you about the bears. One day in the forest he found some bear cubs who were whimpering, with nothing to eat. And as Alexey had long ago learned to understand the talk of beasts, he soon heard all they had to tell of how their mother had lost them there. He put them into a big sack and on his back he brought them home. There he gave them milk and bread, and forced his cat and his four dogs to be friends

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with these three small bears, so that they were like a family.

“Alexey liked them very well, and he was hoping the mother bear would never learn how he had stolen her children. But the cubs whined loud at night; and one night the bear mother, in her long search, came near the house and heard them call. At once she rushed to the palisade. It was too high for her to climb, but she found nearby on the ground a small log. This she raised against the palisade and so climbed up and jumped into the yard. The horse and cows and sheep in the stable smelled her and grew terrified. And the four dogs began to bark. Alexey looked through the small window hole in his door and saw the mother there. What to do? To kill her would be too unjust—and besides, the cubs heard their mother now and grew quite wild to come to her. Should he throw the door open and let them out? But then they could not get out of the yard—for if he came out to open the gate, the mother would kill him with one blow. She was raging now, for she heard her cubs, and was rushing against the door of the hut. But the door was too strong and the windows too high, with heavy shutters bolted tight. Then by one corner log

post of the hut she climbed up to the low roof, and tried to tear the smooth hard planks beneath the thatch. But she could not. Down again the mother jumped, then up once more, then down again—until at last she grew quite tired and sat growling on the roof.

“Alexey had now planned what to do. Quickly he brought the cubs up the ladder into the low attic beneath the roof; and when they smelt their mother so close, they whined and yelled to her, all three. He knew that now she would stay on the roof—so he opened the door below and quickly ran across the yard to the big gates of the palisade. He threw them open, came back to the house, shut the door, climbed the ladder to the cubs in the attic, carried them down, again opened the door and pushed them out; and after them he quickly pushed their wooden trough of milk and bread. Then he jumped back and shut the door. Down came the mother from the roof—and found her cubs eating bread and milk. She smelled it—let them have some more; and when they had finished, she went slowly and quietly with her cubs out of the yard and back to the forest.

“Until this time Alexey had never heard any bears near his home, but now quite often in the

night he heard a bear come by in the forest breaking the bushes in his path—and soon there was quite a bear path just outside the palisade. Alexey was glad, for he told himself that if they were coming so, it was because the cubs had told of their good life inside his house, so they had no more fear or anger against him. Soon even more were coming by. At first his dogs, sheep, cows and horse were afraid of the voices of bears in the night—but at last they grew quiet and did not mind. Then Alexey put some bread on the path the bears had made, and in the morning it was gone. Alexey did not see them yet, for any wild beast knows very well how to hide himself from a man. But they saw Alexey many times, when he went in the forest by day. They saw how he was never drunk, and how he never had anything to do with any other men. He was silent and sober, he went along as though he himself were a beast of the forest. So the bears decided at last that the cubs were right in what they told, and that here at last was a man with whom animals could be friends.

“By now, the winter was close ahead, the time when all bears must go looking and smelling to find a good warm winter home. So, looking and

smelling, they found a great hole not far from Alexey's palisade. In years when he was younger, he had grown potatoes there, and had dug the hole to store them in. It was empty now, and so the bears chose there to have their winter sleep, dry, warm and quiet, under the snow, and near enough to hear the cock. For Alexey had in his stable a cock and two or three hens. In winter, it is good for a bear to be where he can hear the crow of a cock—for then each morning in his sleep he turns on the other side; and so, when winter is over at last, his hide and flesh is not too sore from sleeping on one side the whole winter long. So now the bears came into the hole. Alexey knew that they were there, but he did not trouble them. He did not like to be troubled himself—he liked always to be let alone. And so he treated the bears the same.

“So the winter passed. Then came the sun and melted the snow. Soon the grass began to grow; and slowly the bears crawled out of their hole, thin, hungry and quite sick from their sleep. But they did not forget Alexey Titoff, nor did he forget the bears. Quite often he left some bread on their path, in order to make them still more his friends. In the meantime, the three cubs were

grown, and it happened that in climbing a tree one of them badly mangled his foot and broke also one of the bones. The mother bear then dragged him to the hole and left him there. Soon Alexey heard his whines. He came to have a look at the beast, then set the bone and bandaged it, and left the cub again alone. Soon the mother bear came back, and saw how Alexey had helped her cub. And after that time, no bear was afraid to let Alexey Titoff see him. Often they came by his home and treated the man as one of their friends.

“So it was, until one day a forest inspector came that way, and he soon remarked that there were many tracks of bears around the hut. In vain, Alexey begged the man that he should leave the beasts alone. Although so silent all his life, he now spoke and told the whole story of the bears to the inspector, and he said,

“‘They are not like other bears; I have made them now my friends—and if any now are killed, the rest will think that I betrayed them, and they will never be content until they kill me for the crime.’

“But the inspector only laughed at Alexey Titoff for a fool. He brought some friends from Petrograd, and they made quite a slaughter there. Then

they went off with the bears they had killed and left Alexey again alone. The villages at which he traded waited for him many months, but never again did he appear. So the peasants went into the forest to search—and found him at last in the bushes, dead, and already half eaten by the bears! So they had punished him for the crime. For although Alexey Titoff could understand the language of bears, they could not understand his talk—and so he could not explain to them how he had tried to save his friends.”

* * * * *

Now once again my uncle was stitching, very silent here; but when I besought him for some more tales, at last he began to tell me about a village bootmaker who had bartered his soul to a *chort*. A *chort* is a Russian devil who, though not exactly stupid, still is a creature so naïve that always, when he tempts a peasant, he fails in his diabolical job, and so he is made ridiculous.

“One night this bootmaker,” said my uncle, “had been drinking to the extent that no longer could he possibly know where his feet were leading him; and when he came to his senses at last, he saw that he sat on a stump in a peat bog.

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Around him nothing at all was heard but the whistle of the wind in the trees. So lost he was, that he cried out,

“‘Oh, for a devil—or even a *chort*—to come and help me to go home!’

“Then at once a *chort* was by his side—a stout, brisk little devil with simple eyes—asking, ‘Now, my good man, with what can I serve you?’ The bootmaker said to him, ‘Bring me out of this damned forest to my home!’ The *chort* replied, ‘Good—I will do so.’ And in the next moment the bootmaker found himself sitting just on the edge of his village. The *chort* stood near him, and coaxing said,

“‘Now I was useful to you—you see? And I will be a thousand times more useful—oh, how I will work!—if you will barter for my aid your holy and immortal soul.’ And the bootmaker consented to this.

“So many years passed, and the brisk little *chort* was like a dog working, day and night. The bootmaker grew quite lazy now, for he had hardly any toil to perform. All was done nicely by the *chort*. Not only did he make the boots, but he fed the horses, too, and fed them so well they grew glossy and fat; nor were any cows within many *versts* the

equal to those of the bootmaker now. Also the *chort* kept the house quite clean, and he polished the floor so white as new. A fine new stable the *chort* had made, and long had he sweated in marshy ground to make fields where he could raise the rye. So at last the bootmaker grew quite fat, and was exceedingly well content.

“Then after these years he came to the time when he must give his soul to the *chort*. But the bootmaker said,

“ ‘Now I ask you, old friend, for just one very little chance to be free. Let both of us make the last pair of boots; and if you, with all your wonderful skill, will not be able to finish your boot so fast as I will finish mine, then you will not get my soul.’ The *chort* at once agreed to this, for he thought, ‘Now, of course, with my diabolical speed, I can make my boot more quickly.’ So he replied,

“ ‘That is fair, my good man, we shall do as you say. You are the very honest soul, and it has been a pleasure to work for you.’

“So the bootmaker gave to him leather and thread. He gave him a thread quite long enough for the making of a hundred boots, and he said, ‘Now, please, I ask only this. Promise me not to

break the thread, for it costs so fearfully high, in these days, I must save every inch of it I can. For when you have taken my soul away, my poor wife and little children will soon need all the money I leave.'

"The *chort*, who was quite soft-hearted, was now very sorry for the man; and with a kind smile on his nice simple face, he also readily promised this. Never once would he break the thread until his boot was finished. He did not like to work in a house; always he did his work outside; so now he took leather, thread and tools and went to the edge of the lake close by, where was plenty of air and room for his speed. The bootmaker then within the house broke his thread quickly, made the short ends, and started to work upon his boot. Only, chuckling now and then, he looked out of the window, and he saw how the *chort* had fastened his boot to a tree and ran tugging the long piece of thread far off along the edge of the lake. Then back he raced with it again. The thread was tangling as he ran, in bushes and reeds beside the lake, and so to free it he must stop. Plenty of other *chorts* came to his aid, and all raced back and forth at the job, with grunts and terrible sweat of the brow. But the bootmaker had now finished

his boot, and he yelled to the *chort* on the edge of the lake:

“‘Ah, you devil cursed of God, when at last will you finish your boot? My customer is waiting here! Mine is already nicely made, but still you have not finished yours, though, all the council of hell is at work!’

“So came the *chort* very sad to the house, and with the tears in his simple eyes, he said,

“‘Now this is the first time in all these years I hear from you an unkind word.’

“And exceedingly wounded in his heart, he left the bootmaker and went away to find some other soul to take.”

* * * * *

After telling this tale, my dark little uncle grew silent again for quite a long time—stitching, stitching, stitching—and I could see how his whole mood changed. So serious did he grow. And he said,

“Now I am going to tell to you some stories very strange and deep—so that you will be feeling the power of the Mighty God.” Again he was thinking and then he began.

“In the olden times,” he said, “the life was not

so safe as now, so men have had to hide their gold; and very often such treasure was lost, either because the owner kept his secret until his death, always hoping to live longer and so to enjoy the money himself; or else he died while away from his home, and so could tell no one of his hoard. Now once in Kikimo lived two brothers—most laborious honest young men; and so fond of each other were these two, that never did they marry—because they thought that then their wives could set them one against the other. So they lived for many years. But once in the middle of the night, the younger brother heard how the other rose from his bed and went to the hearth, and made a torch and went down to the cellar underneath their little house. There he remained for a long time. Then he came back into the room and stood looking at the younger one, who now feigned to be asleep. He looked at him like a hungry wolf; then at last he went back to his bed. And this thing happened many nights. At last the younger brother asked what was the cause of this. The older one jumped at him and cried,

“ ‘What have you seen?’

“ ‘I have seen you go down to the cellar each night.’

“‘Ah! But have you never watched me down there?’

“‘Never.’

“The older *muzhik* then was looking at him again like a wolf. ‘Yes!’ he decided. ‘Now come!’ he said. And after making him take the oath, he led his young brother down to the cellar and showed in a hole a big copper cauldron full of gold and the precious stones. He had found it up on the hillside, he said, hidden deep among the trees! And now he looked at it every night to see if all of it was safe. Then both of them began to consult what to do with this great hoard—and at last they resolved to ask the advice of a holy man who lived at that time in the big deep forest far away by Bieloie Lake.

“That winter the younger brother set out, while the older one stayed to guard the gold. For some days he traveled, and at last he was able to find in the forest the holy hermit’s hut of logs. There he saw an old man, over seventy years, but still so strong that in winter-time he never used either the hat or the boots. Very quietly this old hermit looked at the young man, and said,

“‘I know what you have come to ask, for I can read your thoughts, my son. And I tell you

that this gold is damned—for it was hoarded by brigands once, who used to rob and kill the merchants passing along the river there. All of this treasure is so deep cursed that you must not even try to give it to the Church of God, or to make any commerce with it at all. You had better take it back to the hill, and bury it where it was before—until the generations pass and the souls of all those murdered ones will gradually be pacified. Take it back, and make prayer for the victims, my son.²

“The young *muzhik* then returned to his home, and he found that in the meantime his brother grew almost crazy with sitting and looking at the gold. When the younger one repeated the advice of the hermit man, the older disbelieved him. For how could the hermit know, he asked, that all this treasure had been damned? So he began to imagine now that his younger brother was wishing to dupe him and to get the gold for himself! And so that night, when he went to the cellar, he took the big cauldron and carried it out into the forest to hide. But while he was digging, he observed that his brother was looking from behind. In the rage he rushed and with his spade gave such a blow to his brother’s face that both the eyes became

quite blind! But to such an extent had his spirit grown hard, through always thinking of the gold, that he was not sorry for his crime, but only thought with the dark satisfaction that now his young brother could not see to follow him. So he took the gold and buried it in another place.

“Then the young *muzhik*, who was blind, decided that he would try to go back to the old hermit monk. The journey he made was slow and hard; for many days he groped his way along the roads, and begged the aid of all he passed, to guide him there. But now at last he began to feel how some strange force from far away was drawing him surely to the place. He was going not so slowly now; all through one day and through the night he was walking steadily. No fatigue. In the morning he came to the hermit’s hut—and the old monk said to him only this:

“ ‘Now stay, my son, and pray to God.’

“The young *muzhik* stayed, and always prayed. Even while he did work for the hermit, there was no moment in all the day when he ceased to make his prayers for the aid. At last the God has heard his prayer—and gradually the blind young man became most peaceful, tranquil, happy. His hear-

ing soon grew most acute, and the feeling of his skin so fine that he felt at a distance any wall or tree or cavity in the earth. So now he could walk freely about. But still he dreamed about his brother, sitting alone with that damned gold and staring as a hungry wolf. So he began to pray God for his soul. But though he did not pray aloud, the old hermit could hear him, and said to him then,

“ ‘It is too soon to pray for others. You must still pray much for yourself—that at last your sight shall be fully restored.’

“So the young *muzhik* obeyed the advice; and after a long time he remarked that now he was beginning to see a difference between the darkness and the light which came in the dawn. So he grew happier. More he prayed—and at last not only his sight was restored, but now he could see the very thoughts of every man who came that way. When this was so, the old monk said,

“ ‘Now pray for your brother.’

“So he did. Very quiet, but deeply, too, concentrating all the force in his soul, he went on the wings of his mind to his home and begged that the curse be lifted there. And after some weeks of the constant prayer, he saw one night, like in a

dream, his brother's face grow pacified; and he heard the brother say,

"I, too, was blind—but now at last I, too, can see that this gold is damned—and now I shall be free of it!"

"And then the young *muzhik* gave thanks to the God, for he knew that now his work was done.

"On that same night the older *muzhik*, nearly three hundred *versts* away, dreamed that some devils came to him, jeering with the joy of fiends because he had missed to kill his brother. 'For now,' they said, 'he has gone to the city! Blind, he walks along the streets searching for the house of police! Soon he will find them, and they will come and take you away from all your gold!' These devils looked like bears and goats, but all were clad in garb of monks. Only on such garbs were seen not any signs of the Holy Cross. Their heads were covered with the hoods, to make him think that they were saints, but still he could see their hairy beast faces peeking slyly out at him. So never at all was he deceived. In the terror he started to pray to the God! As he prayed, the devils with low cries, whimpering like beaten dogs, were creeping one by one away—and now he saw how his younger brother was coming slowly into

the house. It was then that he said, 'Now I know this gold is damned, and now I shall be free!'

"So he took the big cauldron and went to a swamp. The depth of this swamp was not to be measured, for there were waters deep below. Into this he threw the cauldron now; with the many big bubbles it disappeared. And when it had done so, he felt as though a mountain load had slipped off from his soul. He returned to his home and packed food in a bag, and traveled far to find his brother. Back they came together home, and never did they quarrel again; their lives were quiet as before."

* * * * *

When my uncle finished this story, he looked at me very simply and said, "I do not ask you to believe in the devils that *muzhik* saw in his dream, but I do tell you that men alone, who pray for many years to the God, can learn to see strangely, very deep. For once I met such a holy man." And then he narrated this strange little tale:

"Once in the forest I lost my way; and because I knew that the forest was great, at first I was in the dark despair that ever I should come out alive. But then quite suddenly I was filled by the deep

and very quiet assurance that soon I will come to some dwelling of man. It was as I were led by someone. Hesitating not any more, in some three hours of rapid walk I came to the edge of a small lake; and there at the door of a little hut, I saw was sitting a very old man, in a garb somewhat between that of a monk and that of a simple peasant. Calling me at once by my name, he said that already for some time he had been waiting for me there. I was more than astonished, and thought, 'How does this old man know my name?' He answered at once to my thought, and said,

" 'Because I am able to read in men their thoughts and desires, and what they have done.' I was staring and thinking, 'How can he do so?' And again he answered at once, exactly as though I had spoken aloud,

" 'I can do so,' he said, 'because half my life I have lived here alone and have prayed to the God—and he has given me power not only to see the thoughts of men but even their diseases, too. So they come to me to be cured of their ills. I guide the travelers as well. Far away I could see you, lost in the forest—so in my thoughts I came to you and led you safely to this spot.'

"All this he said to me quietly, as though this

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were quite the usual job. Also he gave me now to eat—the goat's milk, bread and herbs from the forest. I stayed all the night with this old peasant monk, and the next morning he said to me, 'Do not fear to go on again now, for I shall be with you.' And so it was. For I walked through the forest as though he were going at my side. And so by straight walking I came to the village where I had wished to be that day."

* * * * *

Once more my dark little uncle was silent. "And now," he said, "I will tell a story even more strange for you to believe; and yet I vow to you it is true, for I saw it even with my eyes."

And so he began his last story that night:

"On Ladoga Lake there is a group of rocky islands covered with woods, and among them are the places very fine for catching fish, though the water there is exceedingly deep. But the storms on great Lake Ladoga are often ferocious, and last many days; and then woe to any fishermen who may happen to be near those rocks—for almost no harbors are to be found. Now once in the autumn time, some fishermen took me with them there. The wind was behind us from their

home, and in about eight hours we were already on the spot—near by the small island of Holy Herman. By now the water was quite rough; and we have had just time enough to drag up from the water our nets, and load our boats half full with fish, when the wind began to blow at us with a power like the hurricane. Where could we go? We could not go back, for the storm was coming from that way; and before us and on both the sides were islands where the water was boiling white amidst the cliffs. So now we thought that we must die—and in the despair we prayed for our souls—not for our bodies, since we thought ourselves to be already dead men.

“But now we looked out on the water and saw that in front of our boats was a kind of a road—as though oil had been poured to smooth the waves; and over this water-road came an old monk, who with hands raised up was blessing us. While we stared at him with the joy in our eyes, now he turned again to the shore—so our captains quickly steered the boats to follow this strange holy guide, and soon we came between the islands into a small harbor, where at last we moored our ships. Then, as we came to the land, we heard a bell upon the hill, and soon we saw quite a pro-

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cession of monks who were coming down the slope—and among them was the one who had saved us. We followed them up into the church to make a thanksgiving service to God—but now the old monk of the miracle was gone; nor did we see him in the monastery that night.

“But when the *Igumen* (abbot) learned that I could read and write, and was no simple fisherman, he talked with me long about the old monk who had walked out into the storm. He told that this old holy man, with the vow of silence all his life, never for over thirty years had spoken to any one a word; he was always in meditation and prayer. But always most of all did he pray for men in peril on the great lake. So it was quite a common thing for him to bring fishermen into safety, just as he had done with us. For soon he heard in his heart the cries of men who were caught by the hurricane, and were earnestly beseeching God. He was shown where the perishing fishermen were; and then, while still on his knees in his cell, in his heart he was walking out into the storm, till he reached the ships and showed to them the safe way to the harbor. And then, when he saw they had safely come, he went to the tower and rang the bell—so many times as the number of men

who had been saved by him that day. And then all the monks went down to meet them, and bring them to refuge for the night."

So my uncle ended his stories that night.

"This thing," he repeated, "I saw with my eyes. It is hard for you to believe, perhaps. Yet you are still but a small boy—and the boy who grows with the eyes of his mind and all his senses very fine, will soon begin to feel for himself that deep beneath his outward life are forces very truly strange—which no one of us can understand. On the great lakes in the darkness of storms, or in the thick forests in the night, there are many simple men I have known who could steer the boat or walk along, and by some strange sense come straight to their homes. How do they do it? They do not know. And all of us go through the life like that."

MOTHER VOLGA

MOTHER VOLGA

On one of the last evenings we spent together in his home, my friend gave me some myths and stories that he had heard long before, down in the valley of the Volga, where his family used to go for summer vacations when he was a boy. Again I shall try to repeat in his words:

I like to think of the stories now that were told me as a small boy by a wise old fisherman on the Volga, who often took me in his boat out to the spots where the stream ran deep. For the myths he told belong not only to the mighty river there, but to the still mightier stream of our inner national life.

Why was Volga called our mother? In the ancient times, he said, once a peasant near the river lost his wife, then married another; and from that day on there was no quiet in his home. As soon as he went out from his hut, at once the step-

mother began to scold and beat the little children, until they were tortured so that at last they ran to Volga screaming, "Volga! Save us! Be our mother!" Then from out the clear green water Volga rose before them, with white bosom and blue eyes. She wore a green silk *sarafan* all stitched with pearls and threads of gold, and her shining hair was bound with filaments of precious stones. Sadly she replied to them:

"You poor foolish little children—big is your sorrow on the land, but twice as big will it be on the waters. For the life upon the rivers and upon the lakes and seas is hard, and death is always near."

But still they begged her, so she said:

"Then I must ask my brothers and sisters—all the rivers and the lakes that make one family with me." And after she had told them this, down she drifted, disappeared. For a long time the children waited—till at last she rose again. "I have begged them. They agree. I will be your mother now."

As she spoke, there was a rush of wings, and down from the sky came big gray geese and big beautiful white swans. And the gray geese took the little boys, the swans the girls, and off they

flew. For many years the children journeyed, riding high up in the sky, and at night time coming down to Mother Volga for their supper. Many other Russian rivers, and the lakes and the warm seas far to the southward, were their friends—taught them how to fish and swim, and to hunt in the deep forests; taught the girls to build the fires, cook and weave and make the clothes, taught them many songs and stories. When they were grown big and strong, down they came to Volga's shores. And at once the boys began to cut down trees for building ships; and beasts they hunted in the forests, took their hides and made the sails. And far down their Mother Volga sailed their boats to the warm seas, trading in lumber, wheat, and honey, skins, salt, gold and pearls and silver.

So they prospered; years went by. Both boys and girls were married now. So at last they came back together to the place where they were born, to pray at their dead mother's grave. By silver boards let down from their ships, the brothers and sisters came to the shore. They wore boots of red morocco leather, silk *cafetans* with emerald buttons and bound in with belts of gold. To their mother's grave they brought a cypress cross from Jerusalem, which had stood by the tomb of Christ.

And they brought gold and precious stones and other treasures from the East. But then they heard their mother say:

"I bore you, but the Mighty God did not let me live to rear you. You have had another mother. Go to Volga, oh, my darlings; bow to her—oh, bow deep down—and give her my eternal thanks, and give her all you brought to me. Only leave me your prayers and the cypress cross."

The children went on to the grave of their father. Covered deep with weeds it was, and its wooden cross was all bent over by an old white "sorrow stone." They looked farther and saw their stepmother's grave, all covered with bitter absinth grass. A snake had pierced into her coffin, had drunk of her heart and grown poisonous so, and now lay coiled upon her grave. Back went the children to their ships, and bowing deep down, they threw into the Volga the Ural gold, the Persian rugs, and the Indian precious stones. And Mother Volga rose again, and smiling kindly said to them:

"My children, I accept your gifts, for me and all my family, the Russian rivers, lakes, and seas."

Then once more she drifted down into the waters, green and deep. And from that ancient time

until now, never again has she been seen. But she is still mother to us all.

* * * * *

On the night the old fisherman told me this tale, we were fishing from his large flat boat. For a time he was silent, and then he said:

"But Volga is not always kind. You know what a terrible wind we have from the eastward to western shore. On a clear, calm, sunny day it comes—and without any warning at all—and so strong that it turns over our boats and drives big barges and even rafts right across to the other bank. Why does it come so? Why does it stop? The old men tell us that they know. They say that in the ancient times, high above the river towered a range of mountains, and one was highest of them all. So high it was that not even the clouds could come more than halfway up its sides. They dared not climb up farther, because at the top, in a crystal palace, dwelled the Great Spirits of the First Gods. Volga lived among them there. No mortal man could ever climb up, because toward the top were terrible cliffs which flashed in the sun with their snow and their ice.

“On the other side of the river below was a wide, desolate plain of rocks; and one of the Great Spirits who dwelt upon the mountain top, and whose name was Taiga, looked far down at that waste place and willed that a forest should appear. Then the great rocks cracked and thundered, moving like the waves at sea, and slowly through their surface the trees of a forest began to appear; and in a few hours they grew as high as the highest trees that we see now. Then they stopped their growing, and there was silence deep as death, because the Spirit Taiga could not give the forest life. Men feared to enter into it. In all its expanse no cry was heard from any man or beast or bird. And all this time, on the top of the mountain, the Great Spirits in their palace neither spoke to one another nor did they have any part in the life of the earth below. They did not feel, or think, or act. They merely existed—the same as the stars.

“So they lived, until it happened that a very mighty wind blew an angry old woman up to the top. In a village far below, this old woman had lived a long life. Her children and grandchildren had married, and even these had other brats. And the old *baba* watched them all. But the happier

they lived, the more cross and angry grew the old crone. She could never be pleased with anything. All day long she was doing her best to entangle someone in gossip or scandal, 'to tie up everyone by his hair.' Her tongue was full of venomous lies to set them one against the other. At last they all grew so tired of her and their vain attempts to live in peace, that one day they said, 'Now you stay here, for we are all going to move away.' So off they went to another place. But soon she hurried after them, to find out where they would make their home; and already she was hobbling so near to their hiding place that they saw her coming and prayed: 'Oh, you, the stormy winds, and all the rolling thunders, have pity on us, and carry her off!' Instantly, then, a snowstorm came and caught her up and swept her away and carried her off like a little black speck, far up to the top of the mountain, and threw her into the doorway of the crystal palace there. The old crone was now quite blind with snow; her angry old eyes were full of it. So she thought this was the new home of her brats; and at once, as she hobbled inside, she began to bawl at them:

" 'Oh, you cowardly scoundrels, you thought to hide yourselves from me! But now you see you

missed your plan! I am the grandmother of you all, and you must follow what I say!

"So in she walked with curses and yells, and never did she notice that she stood before the Great Spirits now. As they listened, they were quite aghast, for in their long silence in the sky never before had they heard or seen anything like this furious crone. They all grew most uneasy, and to quiet her they agreed that she was their grandmother, just as she said. So the old *baba* stayed with them, and gradually she began once more her old practice—to set one against the other. And as she was experienced all her life in such ill-natured business, soon she succeeded to such an extent that the Spirits did not have a chance to live together peacefully.

"One day, the Spirit Taiga was looking down at his forest below. At once the old crone ran to his neighbor and grabbed that Spirit by the arm. 'Look at him!' she whispered. 'He looks at the forest and thinks it is his! It was not enough for him to have his share here with the rest of you! No—he has made the forest down there so that he can have more than you! You had better throw him out of here!' The Spirits had never thought of such a thing as this before; but it sounded so

truthful on her tongue, and she kept at them so long and so hard, that at last they took Taiga and threw him down. The rocks all down the mountain side crumbled like sand in the path of his fall; the earth trembled, the trees shook off their leaves, the winds were so frightened they bellowed like bulls, and all the clouds rushed in terror away. So Taiga reached his forest, and at once it was wrapped in a shining mist.

“But still, on the top of the mountain, the old crone kept on with her venomous work. She pulled and pointed till all the Spirits kept looking at the forest below, and grew envious of Taiga for the great new home he had. She went to the Spirit Volga, then, and clutching the goddess by the arm, she whispered, ‘Are you a woman so weak you can’t give Taiga a beating and stop his scandalous doings down there?’ And the old woman kept on with her nagging until, with a voice like thunder, Volga jumped into the river below. Far and wide, all the water was covered with foam, and mighty waves rolled to the eastern bank; swiftly the bank was under-sapped, and the trees of the forest crashed into the stream. Taiga came out in a cloud of mist and tried to push the waters back, but the waves slipped through his fingers

and continued their ruinous work. Then Taiga tried another plan—to blow against the waves that came; and he blew so hard that for a while the whole great river stood aghast and retreated—but only for a time. Then back once more the waters came, till at last the whole forest was destroyed. But Volga, blinded in her rage, could not see that the work was done; and so ever since she has continued throwing the waters in long waves up against her eastern bank. And Taiga has grown weak and old, so he does not blow so often now, and not so strong as in ancient times. But still, to defend his forest, he will blow from time to time; and when he blows, woe to the boats that are out upon the water then!”

The old fisherman finished his tale, and quietly looked at his fishhook with a twinkling in his eye.

“I don’t know if this tale is true,” he said, “but once I knew just such an old crone; and so strong and sharp was her nagging that not even the mightiest gods could stop the venom of her tongue.”

* * * * *

At another time, he told me of the awful danger in the Devils’ Fingers which are found in Vol-

ga's sands. These fingers, men of science say, are simply a kind of petrified shell, but my old friend smiled at such foolish talk; and one night when we were fishing and the river was dark and still, he told me a story to explain the true devilish nature of these things. There were heavy black clouds above us that night, and looking up at them he remarked:

"Now, soon the gods will send their arrows—lightning flashes—to the earth, to cut off devils' fingers here." And when I asked him to explain, after a silence he replied, "In summer time, the old men say, when the devils grow very active, the gods raise storms against them and hunt them down with flashing arrows, hoping to cut their fingers off so that they cannot do such harm. And many arrows miss their marks. When you see them flashing from the skies, they appear tremendous things; but when you find them in the sands, buried and grown hard and cold, they are only perhaps twice as big as the finger of a mortal man. And these arrows, the old men say, are a good remedy against wounds. You scrape the arrow with a knife until you make a powder, and then apply it to your wound. But never must you make a mistake and pick up a Devil's Finger in-

stead. These fiery fingers, when cold and hard, are just the size of the God's Arrows and they look almost alike. But of course they are accursed things—and if you pick up one by mistake, and make from it a powder and put it on your cut or bruise, quickly it will all grow red and burn you in a hellish way. Then you will groan and pray to God, and at last you may even send for a doctor—and he will tell you, as you die, that your trouble is gangrene. But the old men call it Anton's Fire."

"Why do they call it that?" I asked.

"In the very olden times," he replied, "over across the river upon that long point of land, there was a drinking house, they say, where came the *bourlaks* (rivermen) from the barges and the rafts. The barkeepers were brothers, Anton Sem-enich and Ivan; and both of them were greedy men—but Anton was so greedy that though he was a rich peasant now, when he went out he would pick up nearly anything he met on his way, and bring it home, that it might be of some little use in its proper time. So, once this rich and greedy one was walking home along the shore, just after a great thunderstorm, when a god was hunting a devil hard, and shot the forefinger from

his hand. Without a forefinger, what could he do? The devil skurried along the shore in a terrible haste to find it and stick it back upon his hand. But as he came quickly near, he saw Anton pick it up and put it into his big bag. At once the devil took the form of a *bourlak*, came to him, and asked:

“‘What did you find there, brother? It’s only fair that you give me a share, for I saw it at the same minute as you.’ But Anton was not the man to be caught in any such way, and he answered:

“‘Go and look for things for yourself! I do not ask you to divide with me what you have in *your* bag!’”

“But the devil was determined to have his finger while it was fresh. So they began bargaining, and at last they came back to the drinking house, and into the bargaining entered Ivan. Now, both these brothers were shrewd men, and they understood at once that this was a devil who wished to have his finger back. But why not sell? they asked themselves. So they sold it for thirty *poods* of pure gold. In addition, the devil undertook to supply the bar with vodka from hell, which would have no tax to pay, and he agreed to serve for a time as a waiter in the bar. This proved to be a

terrible job, for when a *bourlak* has drawn his pay and comes to a bar to drink it away, he likes to treat the waiters like dogs, so that he may feel like a landlord. What that devil suffered from *bourlaks*, it would take too long to tell! Seven days in the week he was beaten and kicked! Not a sweet-looking fellow was he, even when he came to this place; but now he grew quite hideous. Still, he was willing to suffer it all, because he was slyly calculating how one day to take revenge. At last he asked the barkeeper:

“ ‘Ivan Semenich, please allow me to bring some helpers into the bar. We are having a busy season now. So many customers come here that I cannot possibly meet all the orders and be everywhere at once.’

“It was a fact that the business was thriving, because the hellish vodka had already spread its fame far up and down the river. Hardly ever a boat would pass without stopping at the bar. Everybody called and drank at least one bottle of the stuff, and took with it *zakouska*, too. There were days when three or four hundred men went in and out through the doors of the bar. The village blacksmith twice a week had to repair its hinges now! So Ivan Semenich agreed that his

waiter should bring some friends to help—and that same night the devil brought a dozen or so of his comrades from hell. They arrived quite gasping, for hell is not a place near by. Some thousands of *versts* they had to come from down below, through dirt and clay, to reach the surface of the earth. And besides, they had brought with them an enormous load of hellish vodka. Ivan Semenich knew they were devils, and knew they would not attack him at once, but would slyly wait for the chance. So he secretly prepared some holy water for his dear guests!

“Now each day, from the earliest morning, the work at the bar was at full swing; for these devils had put such a charm on the river that never could a barge pass by unless the crew came in for a drink. If they did not come, the sails of that barge would at once be flapping without any wind; but as soon as they came ashore and drank the hellish vodka, at once would rise a splendid breeze. And if two crews came out from the bar and their barges started away, one up the river, the other down, there would be such a separate wind for each, that off they would go at a wonderful speed! With such a spell on the river, no crew boss would stop his crew from calling on Ivan Semenich. And

so the business was thriving now. But still Ivan was not satisfied. The more money he made, the more greedy he grew. Soon he was planning to build such bars all along the Volga, and by selling his hellish vodka become the richest man in the world. This, of course, was exactly what the first devil waiter had put in his mind, and by such a scheme he hoped to destroy not only Ivan Semench, but many thousands of good Christians.

“And he surely would have seen his plan work out with a fine success, if the other devils there had not become impatient. But they grew tired with being kicked and beaten from morning until night—and so they made a scheme of their own to start a splendid riot there; and in order that Ivan should have no one to help him in the fight, they went to his brother Anton first, while he lay asleep in the night, and put a spell upon his eyes. The next day, while he was chopping wood, Anton cut his foot with an ax. Now, of course, he knew the difference between a Devil’s Finger and a God’s Arrow in the sand—but the devils had confused his sight; so instead of a God’s Arrow, he picked up a Devil’s Finger and made from it some powder which he put upon his foot. The wound became inflamed at once, and soon his foot must

be cut off. In fact, he just escaped with his life. Such a burning feeling he had in his foot—it is called ‘Anton’s Fire’ ever since. So now one of the devils came and said to him with a black smile:

“‘Well, Anton Semenich, perhaps this will teach you never again to pick up our fingers from the sand.’

“When Anton told Ivan of this, his brother only smiled, for he guessed that soon the riot would start. Secretly, he went outside and encircled the house by three magic circles, well sprinkled with the holy water which weeks ago he had prepared. And when, a little later, his waiters came leaping at him like dogs—‘Ah, you devils!’ Ivan roared, and he began to beat them all with a holy cross which he held in his hand. Of course they were well burned by it, and soon they were trying to get away. They tried to leap over the three magic circles, but not one of them could cross. Ivan stood behind, and laughing loudly, kept burning them with his holy stick. In the meantime, down in hell, old Satan had waited long for his crew; and never hearing any news, he came now himself to the spot. But even this greatest devil of all could not cross over the three circles; so he stood outside the house and began to bar-

gain with Ivan. And over three thousand *poods* of pure gold Ivan succeeded in getting from him as the ransom price of his devil crew!

"Then all those devils crept away, deep down again into the earth—and so many ages have passed since then that no man can swear to the truth of this tale. But still they come up, the old men say, to do what hellish work they can. And on a night like this one, when a storm is in the sky and the gods send flaming arrows down—then," said the old fisherman, in a low and solemn voice, "you may know that devils are about!"

He had hardly finished speaking when a great flaming arrow darted out of the blackness above. A peal of thunder followed it—and badly frightened now, I begged the old man to row to the shore.

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I pondered secretly very long about these devils and these gods, and grew disturbed in my small boy mind. And so, on another evening, when we were out on the river once more, and the night was growing darker, with only little distant lights from a village on one shore and from the barges passing by, quite solemnly I asked him:

"But who came before all the devils and gods? Who was the very first of the gods? Was it not God, the Father?"

Very meditatively he replied, "In the Holy Book they call Him that, and they tell, as in a story, exactly how He made the world in seven days and seven nights. But I do not think it was done so soon, nor has it all been finished yet, for such things take a mighty time. Our old men tell of another way." Again he was silent, and then he said:

"On a night as cold as this, they say, across the wide, dark wilderness where there was not any path, slowly through such ages as we cannot dream of, the Mighty First One walked along. As He pathed His way, He was breathing hard, and at each breath He left a little cloud of mist behind Him in the night. The cloud which is our whole universe—our earth, the stars and the Milky Way—were made from a single one of such breaths. And they melted away in the dark cold air until they were nothing. For Him, this was done in a moment—for us, it is more like millions of years, and the melting away of our little cloud has not even yet been done. For His time is not like our time. What is for Him one smallest portion of a

moment of His time is millions of millions of our years. We little ones live but a smallest portion of the time that our earth lives—but earth and stars and Milky Way live but a moment of His mighty time. For He goes slowly on and on, and creates new worlds eternally in clouds from His breath that are left behind to melt away in the cold, still night.”

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Again the old man fished silently; and feeling quite awfully solemn now, I looked up at the stars and the Milky Way. Then at last he continued:

“But this Mighty One is far away, and the smaller ones, both devils and gods, are always near. And to help us against the evil ones, the good Christ came, for He is kind. Of how he came to Russia first, the old men tell another tale. In the very olden days, they say, there was a great forest here of man-and-beast-devouring trees. As soon as a man or a beast or a bird touched even the very smallest twig, at first slowly, as though from a slight breeze, the tree began to move its leaves, its twigs, and then its branches—and then, in a movement swift as lightning, all the branches leaped down on their prey. With a crash his

bones were broken, and then the tree began to suck the blood of its victim through its leaves, until only a bloodless pulp was left. Then the branches all flew up again, and the carcass of the victim fell down to earth and enriched the soil. So in time such trees grew enormously large. They were called Satan's trees, because always near by sneaked devils waiting for their chance to catch a man's soul, as soon as the life of his body had been taken away.

"For many years men fought those trees; they tried and tried to chop them down. But nearly all those men were killed—and at last the good Christ heard their cries. 'Now we must help these men!' He said. 'The devils have had their chance too long in Russia!' So He sent His disciple, Holy André, down to our land—teaching him first the holy words to use against the devils here, and He gave him a staff which had been blessed. So Holy André came down and taught men how to deal with this devil's crew. And very soon he made everything right. For when he touched with his blessed staff those man-and-beast-devouring trees, their leaves at once were shriveled up, so men at last could chop them down. And this is why, to the present time, men still call this Holy Russia—

not because we are so holy, but because in the ancient days, Holy André, sent by Christ, came and taught us how to live and drive all evil from our land.

“Much other work has the good Christ done. Always since the oldest times, He has been like a god of new life in the spring, and He fought many devils here. One of the very worst of them all the old men called Jehovah. He was not the same as the god of the Jews; he was a much more ferocious god of darkness and of awful death, and so he hated the young God Christ who was always bringing in the light. And so very powerful was he, that for many ages here men gave him living sacrifice in order to quench his thirst for blood. In the early spring season, at the time when the day begins to conquer the night, they knew that they must sacrifice some living creature to this old god; so that while he devoured it, he might forget to struggle for his long kingdom of the night, and so Christ’s shining kingdom of spring and light could come to men.

“I remember a story I heard about this. A young merchant on the Volga, who was a fine, courageous young man, married a beautiful young girl; and when he brought his bride to his home,

MOTHER VOLGA

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which was of stone with vaulted rooms, Persian rugs, and crystal and silver—his neighbors all began to say, 'This is the handsomest young pair that ever existed in this land!' She was such a beautiful girl, that it seemed she was wrapped in a garment of light which poured out from her as from a shrine. So all men liked the happy pair. But not so it was with the devils and their old god Jehovah, for such black monsters always hate all happiness and good success. So now they held a council. How to take the young girl's life and break the young man's fortunes down? Many dark proposals were made, but all were either not cruel enough, or too hard to carry out. Then at last Jehovah said:

" 'This is how it shall be done. Soon the spring is coming, the time when, in my honor, a human sacrifice must be made. We must so contrive that this young girl shall be that bloody sacrifice.'

"And so the hellish plan was made. They brought terrible snowstorms over the land, and such frosts as had never been seen before; and then they came in nightmares to the old Councillor of the Prince, who reigned where the young merchant lived; and they told him that Jehovah would never take away the snowstorms and the

ice and heavy frost, unless on the day of the equinox there should be sacrificed to him the first human creature who should be met with by the Prince on his ride from his palace. No other human sacrifice that year would Jehovah accept. The old Councillor grew very sad, but soon he felt it must be done, else all the people would die of cold. So a trench was dug outside the town, where the victim was to be buried alive, so that the old god of the dark, cold earth might devour the creature in his own home.

“On the night before that awful day, the young bride of the merchant scarcely slept. Her husband had gone on a long journey for the sake of his Volga trade, but it was almost over now. She remembered how carefully, when he departed, he had calculated the time; and so, since the two months were just gone, she knew that he must return the next day. She looked and looked for the sun to rise, for at sunrise he had promised to come, and she resolved to go gaily forth, to meet him sooner on the road. Her best silk *sarafan* she put on, and her *shuba* embroidered with silks of all colors, and her soft red morocco boots. So she set out from the house, saying first to her old nurse that she was going to meet her husband. The

anxious old woman answered that it was better to stay at home, but the girl was so impatient she only laughed and ran down the road.

"The *cortège* of the Prince, in the meantime, surrounded by his guards on horseback, slowly moved through the streets of the town. Though the sun had risen some time before, every street was empty, not even a dog was to be seen. For the news had spread of that awful doom. Slowly in front of the *cortège* walked the old Councillor of the Prince, looking and looking on every side, but seeing no sign of any life. But when the *cortège* came out of the town, they saw the young girl running down the road. Immediately out sped the horsemen, and she was caught by those mounted guards. A fearful silence had come on each one, for each felt terror at the thought that they must bury her alive. Most stricken with horror of them all was the old Councillor himself; but remembering the terrible storms and those black nightmares that had come, he knew that old Jehovah never could be pacified with any sacrifice but this. The young bride did not know why she had been seized, nor why she was being carried so rapidly to the deep ditch—for her life had been lived in a kingdom near by, where no such sacrifice was

made. So never did she guess what would happen until she was struck upon the head, and, senseless, thrown into the ditch. Quickly they heaped upon her the soil. Only her *shuba* of silk of all colors and her red morocco boots were placed on her grave at the side of the road.

“But many days before this time, her young husband had finished his business and was already hurrying home. The great stallion which he rode was a beast that nothing could tire out. Across the valleys and over the hills, he rushed as quickly as over a plain. Day and night they journeyed on; and once in the dark night time, when they were crossing a wide marsh, he turned his head to his master, and said: ‘Now sit firm in your saddle, my master, for now I must be going full speed. For my ears have caught upon the winds the news that some devils are making ready a hellish plan against your wife!’ And then the great stallion began to fly, as never in his life before. For he liked the young bride of his master; and he remembered, when they set out, how she kissed him between his eyes, and begged him to serve his master well and bring him safely home to her. Into his mane she had braided a ribbon from her own soft head, and had said to him many endear-

ing words. So faster and faster he flew along; and on the very morning of that awful sacrifice, the young merchant came to his home.

“He found the old nurse crying there, and she told him how her mistress had gone to meet him on the road. With a terrible feeling of danger, then, he rode away to find where she was; in a few minutes he met the *cortège* which was returning to the town; and as soon as he saw them, he guessed at once the awful doom which had come to his wife. He galloped to the place of her grave. With his hands he tore off the frozen earth, took out from under it his young wife, and on his horse he brought her home. And there is a happy end to this tale. For Jehovah in his frenzy had made a very stupid mistake. With his frosts he had frozen the earth so hard that when they threw the frozen clods down into the victim’s grave, the life-giving air could still come down between the clods, so she could breathe. And so, in her home, when her terror was gone and her freezing body had been warmed, slowly the color came in her face, her eyes opened; and when she saw her young husband, instantly she came back to life!

“Then, from high up in Paradise, the Holy

Christ and his saints looked down and saw what those monsters had tried to do. Swift as the lightning, these Shining Ones came from the heavens down into the hell where Jehovah and his devils were, and they hunted the devils and the old god and gave them such a thrashing that like whimpering dogs they were, and promised to work no more schemes of this kind in all the time that was to come. So the ice of the winter was broken at last, the forces of darkness were driven away; and since that day, the awful custom of burying living creatures has been everlastingly left behind. For Christ is always watching now."

* * * * *

Then he told me another tale about Christ:

"Once upon this country there fell a very awful frost. All the river was ice. No bird could fly, for as soon as it rose into the air it was frozen and fell like a lump to the ground. On that night, a long train of sledges, loaded with the frozen fish, slowly came up Volga's shore. When horses and men were near death with the cold, they came at last to a little *yam* (inn) where they hoped to find shelter for the night. But there they found an empty place which had been robbed by brig-

ands. No food nor any fuel was left, so they started on, with groans and prayers, to the next *yam*. But it was sixty *versts* away, and long before they could arrive all the men and the horses died of the cold, and at once their souls flew up to God. Saint Peter stood at the gate and asked:

“‘What kind of foreigners are you? The river hooligans you are! Be off with you! Here is no place for filthy coats of sheepskin and such boots as yours! And you even bring your horses, too! You would make all Paradise stink of fish!’

“‘But how is this?’ the poor fishermen cried. ‘Frozen and starving in the night, we were carrying fish to Christians, so that they might have food to eat! We were serving our masters faithfully, too—while you, old coward, when you were on earth, denied your Master three times in one night!’

“Saint Peter raged, but sweetly replied: ‘Go back to earth, my children, and go to a desert and beat your flesh, and pray patiently to God. And when He has made you clean at last, I will admit you with a deep bow.’

“But this was heard by some Russian Saints, and coming out of the gate they asked, ‘Where do you come from, Brothers?’

“ ‘From Kostroma on the Volga. Poor *muzhik* fishermen are wel’

“ ‘Please wait a bit.’

“The Holy Ones went at once to the young Christ and told him of the trouble there. And Christ went to his Father’s throne and said, ‘We must let these *muzhiks* in. On earth they worked the hardest of all, but barely could make two ends meet. Their bodies are thin, not from fasting in Lent, but from long hard toil for their brother men. They work so hard they have not time even to make the sign of the cross, and they cannot smell incense because of the smell of the fish that they carry for others to eat. They must come into Paradise!’ Then he went to Saint Peter and said, ‘If you do not like the smell of fish, it shows you are getting too old for this place—you forget you were once a fisherman.’ And to the Russian Saints he said, ‘From this day on, you guard the gate—and allow any man to enter here, no matter his creed or nation or race—so long as in his life on earth he did useful work for his fellow men.’

“So old Peter, raging still, sits alone in Paradise—while our Russian Saints stand at the gates and receive as a brother any man who, by his muscles

or his mind, has done useful work to improve the lot of his brother creatures down below."

* * * * *

"One more story I will tell," said the old fisherman quietly, "and then we will go back to shore—for now it is late for a little boy, and the fish are not biting well tonight." He was silent a little and then he began:

"Now I am going to tell you of how another saint was made. I heard this tale from Stephan Vassilievich, who is so old that he stays on the shore. When he was a boy no older than you, he heard it from his grandfather—and that grandfather in turn heard it as a little boy. It would take too long to tell you how many grandfathers, back and back, have told this story. It is very old—I think perhaps a thousand years—and it is about the Czar Ivan, who reigned on the Volga from end to end, in the very early times.

"The young Czar Ivan liked well his people, but he knew them very little, as is usual among Czars. So he decided to go among them, not as a Czar but just as a man, so that none of his people should tell him the lies which he was always hearing from the nobles in his court, who were

always talking, talking, and never did anything that he said.

“First of all he went to the merchants. He was well received by them, they gave him plenty of food to eat—but they could give little of their time, because they were busy taking account of profits and losses, what they had bought and what they had sold, and what was needed and what they must pay, and to what distant places they must send. When they had some spare time, at once they began to make schemes for future ventures. The poor young Czar stood waiting, then, with nobody to talk to him. At last a very busy old merchant bumped against him in the doorway. ‘Please! Get out of the way!’ he said. And so the Czar went away from the merchants. He could make nothing of their talk.

“He went next to some fishermen on the Volga. They received him very well; they took him to their fishery and made him eat fish both fresh and dried—until his whole body, and even his soul, felt to be quite filled with it. ‘Now it is time for our fishing,’ they said. They took him out in a big boat and asked him to sleep on a rug in the cabin; but when he wished to talk with them, they begged him to keep silence—else the fish would

never bite. The fish were biting very soon and the men were busy all the night. The nice young Czar was busy, too, for there were plenty of bugs in the cabin, biting just as well as the fish. When the boat came to shore, the Czar went away.

"Then he went to the peasants. By chance he happened to come to the hut of a good old *muzhik* who lived alone with his old wife. The peasant kindly asked his guest to take the place of honor, and he put in front of him a loaf of black bread with some salt. Then he went out to take care of his cattle, and after he had finished that work he came back to the hut for his supper. They ate cabbage soup and gruel; and as soon as supper was done, the old man and his wife climbed up to their bed on the top of the stove, and at once fell asleep. They were snoring slowly all the night. Their guest had been given the place of honor, on the bench beneath the ikons. The next morning the old *muzhik* asked,

" 'Did you sleep well?' The Czar replied,

" 'I did not close my eyes all night!'

" 'Why, then?'

" 'Oh,' replied the Czar, 'I am used to sleepless nights, and your kind hospitality had nothing at all to do with it. I think in the night time.'

“‘You think?’ asked the peasant. ‘What do you think?’

“‘I think,’ said the young Czar sadly, ‘that no one ever does what I say.’ The old *muzhik* grew thoughtful a moment, then asked,

“‘But why don’t you do such things yourself?’

“‘In my position,’ began the Czar. Then he stopped. ‘But you would not understand.’

“The old man was thinking quietly. ‘But why not buy a calendar?’ he asked.

“‘A calendar?’

“‘Yes, a calendar. Then you look to see who is the saint of the day, and you know exactly what kind of work you can do on that day with the help and blessing of that saint. For each saint is good for different things. And if there are any other things, the good God will help you there. You see how very simple it is.’

“‘Yes, very simple,’ said the young Czar. He stayed with the peasant for many days, watching and learning about his work; and he grew so fond of the old man that at last he asked him to come to the court.

“‘I am rich, I live in a town,’ he said, ‘and the life is different there. I was your guest—now please be mine. Here is money, so that while you

are gone you can hire somebody to do your work.'

"They departed together. When they came to the town, the peasant at once saw that his young friend was the Czar. The Czar was smiling and watching to see the confusion of the old man, but the *muzhik* was too simple to understand the importance of being a Czar, so he was not at all uneasy when he was asked to stay at the court. He had brought along his calendar. Each morning he prayed to the saint of that day, and at night he prayed to God, whom he knew to be his highest chief and his best friend under the stars. So he was only curious here. All his life he had only worked—so he watched to see what work this Czar and his nobles were doing in their court. But he saw that they did no work at all—so after a week he said to the Czar:

" 'Now let me go home. I grow sick at your home, because here I have nothing to do.'

" 'Be patient,' said the young Czar, with a smile. 'You will be all right as soon as you learn what is the most important thing to know in the town and at the court—to know how to do nothing.'

"But the old *muzhik* could not learn, and soon

he was looking very sad. So in order at last to give him work, the Czar said to him one day:

“ ‘Now I am going to write the laws, and you shall help me.’

“ ‘The laws?’ asked the peasant. ‘What are they for?’ The Czar was astonished.

“ ‘But,’ he said, ‘for you, of course, and all the rest!’

“ ‘Do you take us for children?’ the old man asked. ‘Or for bandits—that you must give us the laws?’”

“ ‘But,’ said the Czar, ‘I must protect you!’

“ ‘Don’t you have any fear,’ the *muzhik* replied. ‘If anyone tries to do me harm, I know very well how to punish him—and all my decent neighbors will help. The best you can do is to leave me alone. Don’t put your nose into my affairs.’

“ ‘But how about merchants? They must have laws.’

“ ‘Eh, leave them alone, the merchants. Do you think they have nothing in their heads—and you have all the thoughts in yours?’

“The young Czar grew quite cross, and said, ‘But what, then, shall I do with my judges—and my police?’

“The old man asked what work they did, and

when he heard he scratched his head. 'All I see,' he said, 'is that if somebody steals from me three roubles, your judges and police spend twenty in order to catch the thief. And that twenty roubles I pay you in taxes. So the best I can hope is that, if they catch the thief and he still has the three roubles he took, still I am losing seventeen.'

"'Go,' said the Czar, 'and sit in that chair! There is no use to talk to you!' But a few days later he asked the old man, 'Do you wish to go along with me? I am taking my army out for war against my neighbor Czar.'

"'What has he done against you?' the old *muzhik* quietly asked.

"'He has done me dishonor!' replied the young Czar. 'In his palace my picture hangs on the wall, and before it his servants have always saluted—but now the soldiers of his guard are allowed to pass it by!'

"'There is in my home an old goat,' said the peasant. 'He is cross because most of his hair is now gone. There is also a dog who is eaten by fleas—and when meeting the goat, he barks. But if sometimes he does not bark, the goat at once feels so offended that he runs at the dog with his horns.'

“ ‘Now I will hang you!’ yelled the Czar.

“ ‘Why?’ asked the *muzhik*.

“ ‘Because you compare me with an old goat!’

“ ‘Oh, no—you compare yourself with a goat. And besides, I must remind you that you invited me to your home, and so, since you love your honor so much, you will not do me any harm. I am an old man, my son. Think long—and go and pray to God—before you try to make this war.’

“The young Czar was praying all the night. The next day he said to the peasant,

“ ‘Look here! I have spoken to my ministers, and to all my generals, too, and have told them I have decided never again to make any war. They replied, “Then what is left for us here?” And now they wish to go away!’

“The simple old *muzhik* looked pleased with this. ‘You see,’ he said, ‘how simple it is. Now go and pray to God some more.’

“The young Czar did so. At last he came back. By this time most of his nobles were gone, and his palace was almost empty.

“ ‘Without ministers, army, judges, police, what kind of a Czar am I?’ he asked. ‘I must find myself another job. What do you think of my being a merchant?’

“‘Eh, my son,’ the old man said, with a slow wise shake of his head, ‘to be a merchant, one must have something inside of the skull. I do not believe that you are very shrewd.’

“‘A fisherman, then?’ thought the young Czar. But he did not speak of this, because he well remembered the bugs in that cabin on the Volga boat. So after long, long thinking now, he said, ‘I will buy a calendar.’ This he did, on that same day, and then went home with his old friend. Soon he was a *muzhik*, too—but a very rich one, with two hundred cows. And so well did he do, so good and kind was he to all the people about, that his fame soon spread on Volga’s shores. He lived a long and useful life; and when he died, he was made a saint, and his name was put into the calendar, too. For in Holy Russia the only true saints are those who have served their brother men.”

And after this last story, the old fisherman slowly rowed to the shore.

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